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digit Fast Track to MOBILE APPS++

Mobile OS'
Applications
Games
Hardware
Accessories
What's next



1. The software
2. The hardware
3. What's next?
4. The fantastic five

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO EVERYDAY TECHNOLOGY

Fast Track to **Mobile Apps**

By Team Digit

Credits

The People Behind This Book

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Introduction

Once upon a time, in a galaxy we all love, a Digit staffer bought himself a new iPhone and waxed eloquent about its many features. Then he took it one step too far, proclaiming the iPhone OS and its many apps as the greatest contribution to the world of software.

Riled up, the Windows Mobile users among the team jumped to their feet and questioned his sanity, while a Mac fanboy stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our new phone owner.

Warriors of the Symbian tribe tried to enforce peace between the two factions, as they knew theirs was the best platform ever created. That's when the Java veterans stepped into the room and all hell broke loose.

Suddenly, a voice boomed, seemingly from out of nowhere: "Stop this fighting instantly!" Frozen in their tracks, the argumentative lot turned to see their benevolent editor standing at the door, the sun shining behind him. He looked like... nay, he was, a god among mortals. He knew, better than any of his followers, that there are enough applications out there for every platform to fulfill any task desired.

Still, the petty squabbles of the children needed to be resolved. The old man had learnt a trick or two in his time.

"I have certain tasks that need to be done on a mobile phone," his baritone voice rung across the room. "You will all tell me which software on your platform can achieve these simple deeds."

The staffers rushed to their cubicles and started preparing their lists. The editor smiled and turned.

"And oh," he added, almost as an afterthought, with his back to the room, "freeware gets extra points."

1.1 – An introduction to mobile operating systems and platforms

In the US, Microsoft has recently started airing a series of advertisements in a campaign against Apple. In each commercial, an “everyday Joe” (a little research by some journalists has shown these to be actors) is given a certain amount of money by Microsoft and told to buy a computer of their choice in a hardware retail outlet.

The person visits the shop and browses through the products, comparing them side-by-side. Invariably, for a limited budget, they find better hardware specifications for a laptop or PC running Microsoft Windows than one of Apple’s devices. The moral of the ads seems to be that you get more bang for your buck when you use a Windows PC over a Mac.



Today's phones such as the iPhone 3G above are as capable as a low-end desktop PC, thanks to their advanced operating systems

However, Microsoft fails to address one of the biggest issues in buying a computer – the operating system. Sure, you will get hardware that is a lot more cutting edge for a \$1,500 laptop PC than you would on a MacBook of the same price. But when you consider that the latter is running OSX, which requires a lot fewer resources than Windows and is much simpler and better to use, does the price not seem valid?

Microsoft has to sell its products and an ad is hardly ever going to be fair; our only point with this little piece of information is that operating systems (OS) and platforms are an integral part of a buying decision, and the factor is no different in the case of mobile phones.

Largely, there are three popular base platforms for cell phones in India: Windows Mobile, Symbian S60 and Java. Of course, there is a fair portion of the audience that uses the Blackberry platform on devices made by Research In Motion, Palm OS on their Palm handsets and the iPhone OS. We are not ignoring these, but given the constraints of editorial space and Google's Android (more on this in the 'What's Next' section) is yet to come around to our shores, so we have discounted those.

Java, by itself, is not an operating system. Like its counterpart for the PC, this is a platform that runs on top of any OS. This lets programmers transcend the constraints of the base OS and deliver their software to a wider audience. Indeed, you will be hard pressed to find phones that do not support Java, and as such, it is the most widely-used platform. The popularity of Java is largely due to the fact that most cell phone manufacturers, such as Nokia, Sony Ericsson, Motorola, etc., have a proprietary light OS for their low- to mid-end phones. The common thread between all these phones is Java, and hence it makes sense for developers to code their software for an all-encompassing platform.

As for Symbian, Nokia has championed its cause for a long time now. The majority of its business-oriented E-series as well as its high-end N-series of phones use the Symbian Series 60 (S60) 3rd edition operating system. Even some LG, Samsung and Sony Ericsson phones now come preloaded with Symbian-based operating systems, including the heavyweight Omnia HD and the much-hyped 12-megapixel touting Sony Idou. Newer offerings, like the touchscreen 5800 XpressMusic and the

upcoming N97, run on an upgraded version of the platform: the S60 5th edition. Not many applications have been programmed for the latter yet, so unless it is specifically mentioned, assume that the Symbian programs mentioned in the upcoming pages may not work on these newer devices.

Windows Mobile, of course, is a ubiquitous platform. Right now, version 6.1 is the most common iteration, with it being loaded on almost all the new smart phones, right from the HTC Touch and its many variants to the Sony Ericsson Xperia. With its immense popularity on smart phones, this is the most widely used platform for high-end phones – especially touchscreen ones – and hence features prominently in the upcoming pages.

Also, just to clarify, there used to be a differentiation made between smartphones and pocket PCs till a few years back. The former were basically full-fledged phones with a keypad, while the latter sported touchscreen displays that had to be operated with a stylus. This was especially common before Palm's fall from its position as a heavyweight player in the industry (although with the Palm Pre and the WebOS, we might just see a resurrection; again, more on this in 'What's Next'). But over the past few years, the lines between the two genres have blurred and the term 'pocket PC' has died out. 'Smart phone' is now the common term for any mobile phone that offers PC-like functionality.

This wide variety of operating systems makes a compilation of smart phone software a bit difficult. While we would like to include essential software for each platform, it is simply not possible given editorial constraints. By and large, we have tried to give a solution that works across many platforms; but there were some OS-specific programs that we found very difficult to ignore and just had to put them in. We hope that we have covered most of the software you will need on your platform.

Armed with all this knowledge of operating systems, you are ready to flip to the next few pages of essential smart phone software; that is, if you already know what OS your phone is running on. If you do, then there is no reason to stick around here, and you can safely skip the next few paragraphs. However, if you are unclear about which platform's software works for you, it might be best to read on.

1.2 – How to identify your platform

As stated, mobile phone platforms are so diverse that it is difficult to know what your phone is running. You could always check the user manual that came with your handset to find out what your phone uses. However, a lot of you will have thrown away the manual a long time ago, or may have difficulty in locating the appropriate information as it is buried deep in a corner. The Internet, though, can help you out.

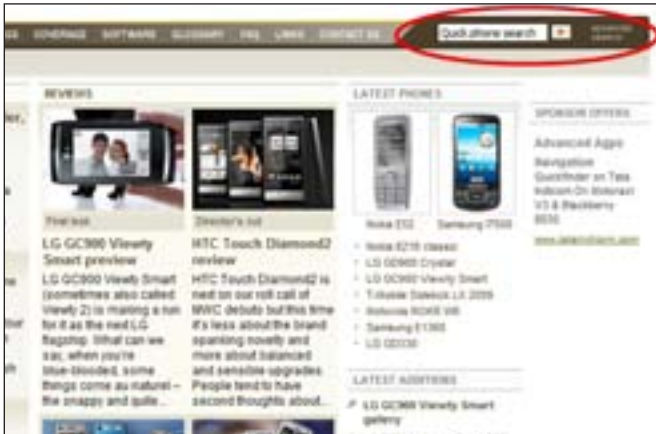


Fig 1: GSM Arena can help identify your platform

To start off, visit one of our favourite resources for phone-related information, GSM Arena at www.gsmarena.com.

If you know the brand and model number of your mobile phone, then simply search for the same in the search box provided at the top right corner (Fig 1).

Alternatively, if you are unsure about the model number of your phone, just use the listing of brands on the left to browse through the different models in a pictorial grid – after all, at least you know what your phone looks like!

Once you locate your phone through either method, click on it to open its specification sheet (Fig 2). Taking the example of the newly-launched Nokia E52, the first entry in the 'Features' section lists the operating system of your phone (circled in red in Fig 2).

For phones where the OS is not listed, or for those operating systems that are not listed in the upcoming pages of the book, you will need to know whether your phone supports Java. It is very rare that a smart phone comes without it, but just in case, you can always verify this by checking the last entry of the features section (circled in blue in Fig 2).

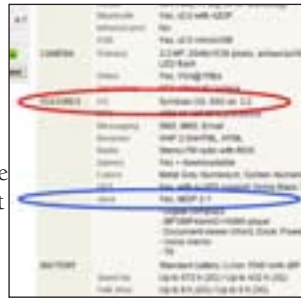


Fig 2: There's your OS!

GSM Arena also offers the ability to let you sort mobile phones by their operating system. Visit the home page again, and click on the 'Phone Finder' (Fig 3).

In the page that is displayed, scroll down to the 'Operating System' entry and click the drop-down box to choose the desired platform you are looking for.

All of this information is easily available on your phone-maker's web site in the official entry for your model. Users of CDMA cell phones might need to use this, as GSMarena will not have listed your phone.

Of course, if you are an internet-savvy user, you can always use Google for all of this information by keying in your phone's



Fig 3: You can also sort phones by their OS using the phone finder

model or the desired OS/platform. And if your mobile phone model has a Wikipedia entry, that would also be a source for easy information.

Regardless of whether you run GSM or CDMA, you can also always call the customer service for your brand and ask them to help you out with this information.

In case all else fails, we recommend you resort to the official Digit forums (www.thinkdigit.com/forum) and you will surely find a kind soul who will help you out.

1.3 – Security and Maintenance

NetQin Antivirus

Who says you have to pay to get a good antivirus?

Virus threats on mobile phones are increasing. In the past two years, Trend Micro and F-Secure have released several reports – the most notable ones being at the CTIA (Cellular Telephone Industries Association) annual gatherings – that talked of a trend where viruses have been on the rise in cell phones.

The bulk of these viruses were found to be on two platforms: Windows Mobile and Symbian. Needless to say, antivirus companies from Symantic to Kaspersky were quick to launch several mobile antivirus kits.

As users of one of the two platforms, we eagerly await to see a solution from one of the big three Windows desktop freeware antivirus companies, viz. AVG, Avast, Avira. Till then, a possible alternative is Chinese firm NetQin's mobile antivirus package.

The installation is pretty easy and straightforward, and doesn't take up much disk space either (varying, depending on the platform). Upon installation, it'll prompt for an update of the virus definition files, done quickly over your wireless connection.

The first scan will, of course, take a long time and users should be prepared to start it at night, before sleeping. The



NetQin Antivirus

software claims to dig into the core of each file to scan it and uses battery power effectively while at it – two aspects that have been verified by several reviewers.

Still, if you do start the scan during the day and need to use the phone in between, hit the helpful ‘pause’ button and resume the scan whenever you have the time.

What’s more, the software features a great real-time monitoring tool. NetQin is vigilant about any data that is being sent over SMS, MMS, Bluetooth, infra-red, GPRS and other network connections, and claims to detect and block threats effectively. We didn’t test this, but the software worked fine overall, so there’s no reason to doubt it.

The smashing part about this program is that apart from WinMob and Symbian, it’s also compatible with almost every Nokia phone out there; and given the average Indian’s affinity for the Finnish company, that’s great news for us.

Platforms: Windows Mobile, Symbian, Nokia S40 operating system

Price: Free

Download: www.netqin.com

SpyBot Search & Destroy for Mobile

Malware be gone!

With mobile phones becoming an everyman’s first point of access to technology, isn’t it just a matter of time before hackers decided to concentrate solely on these? We use banking services through our phone, pay our bills, access our email, etc., making phones the ideal target for data thieves.

Thankfully, spyware and malware aren’t as ubiquitous on cell phones as they are on computers. Still, there has been an increase in the number of reported threats on handheld platforms and it seems very likely to go up exponentially.

One of the best tools to check the threat of spyware and malware on PCs has been Ireland-based technology firm Safer Networking’s SpyBot – Search & Destroy. The company has now ported its popular program to the world of mobile computing with the launch of



SpyBot for the mobile

Spybot – Search & Destroy Mobile Editions.

Spybot Mobile uses a lightweight version of the original software to primarily detect threats on Windows Mobile phones, although it also scans some Symbian-based platforms. The possibility of the latter being infected is rare, the company says, but adds that they could act as carriers for malware to infect other phones.

Taking up a mere 2.6MB of disk space, the installation is smooth and simple for even a layman. And those who have used the PC version of Spybot will find themselves right at home.

Starting the application, the home screen is quite idiot-proof. There's a 'Scan' button at the bottom left, hitting which starts the program.

Now, users are advised to be a little patient, as the scan can go on for half an hour, depending on the size of your memory card and the amount of data you have on it. Still, you won't be running this every day, so it's a small price to pay for a once-in-a-while application.

Once you're done with the scan, the usual options of Quarantine, Remove, etc., pop up. Perform the appropriate action and you're good to go!

As of now, the program lacks the kind of real-time monitoring tool that the PC version comes with. While this feature is not really needed at the moment, it might be so in the future.

Still, given the amount of protection it's providing for the free price-tag and the tiny size, Spybot is a must-have on your smart-phone.

Platforms: Windows Mobile, Symbian

Price: Free

Download: www.safer-networking.org

<http://forums.spybot.info/downloads.php?cat=12>

PHM Registry Editor v0.70

Before you do anything else, always backup the registry...

Any tech enthusiast who uses the Windows operating system has, at some point or the other, fiddled around with its registry. This database controls how smoothly your system works, and every change you make has some entry in the registry.

So in a guide like this Fast Track, where you are going to

be installing and uninstalling myriad applications, and even tweaking the registry for some others, it's of utmost importance that you back it up first.

The easiest tool we found for this purpose is the PHM Registry Editor by developer Philippe Majerus. There are other registry backup tools available, of course. But PHM's easy environment and the fact that it also allows for editing the registry made it a no-brainer choice, because such dual-functionality is large restricted to commercial software and not freeware.



PHM Registry Editor

Since our primary purpose here is backup, remember to do that first. It's a very simple process: Just go to **Tools > Backup** and save your file to a desired location. In case something does go wrong later, the restoration process is just as easy, through **Tools > Restore**.

When you do want to mess around with the Windows Mobile registry, it might be a good idea to use PHM Registry Editor for it. It's not that you can't do it through the default Windows interface; it's just that PHM is tweaked to handle changes and comes with features meant for this task.

The main attraction is the dual-paned window, with the explorer-type registry on top while the keys in each folder are listed below. The layout is really helpful while editing the registry and this alone should be a good enough reason to use the software.

There are other features, such as custom views and filters, a great search function, etc; but even without all that, if backup is what you want, there are few programs that are as simple as PHM Registry Editor.

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: <http://www.phm.lu/products/PocketPC/RegEdit/>

1.4 – Contact and information management PIM Backup

Backup and restore all the personal information on your phone without any hassles!

One of the biggest concerns on any mobile user's mind is the safety of the personal data on his or her phone. You have met a thousand people and have as many contacts stored, making it simply inhuman to remember all those names and numbers. That's why you have a phonebook, right?

And those SMSes! The sweet nothings texted to that special someone, a few special messages from a friend or ones with important business-related information – it's impossible to part with these. But what if your phone were to be attacked by a virus? What if you were to lose all this information somehow? Suppose someone hit reset by mistake? What do you do?



Worry not, PIM Backup will save the day. This easy-to-use application claims to back up and restore all your personal information with just a few clicks.

The home screen lets you choose the broad categories you want to backup: Appointments, Call logs, Contacts, Messages, Speed dials, Tasks and Custom. The last one is, obviously, to back up a few user-defined files. Just tick or untick a checkbox – it's really that simple!

Hit 'OK' and 'Next' a couple of times and the software will take you to a screen with a few options. We recommend you tick the checkboxes for 'Compress backup' and 'Binary backup' as these will speed up the process while taking up lesser disc space.

The entire backup is saved in one of two formats. The binary backup, which you selected, will give you a custom .PIB file. The .PIB is simply a modified Zip format, and can be extracted easily.



Hassle-free backup

Of course, extracting a binary file wouldn't do most users any good when it comes to modifying the content.

Still, if you do want to fiddle around with the content after backing it up, you could uncheck the 'Binary backup' option. This creates an Excel-like CSV file in the PIB backup, taking up much a lot more space but being easily editable.

It would be wise to take a binary backup first, and then a CSV backup as well to store remotely on your PC.

And yes, PIM Backup is robust enough to offer an automatic backup scheduler for the forgetful types among us. You can set the day and time on which the program will run, and even choose to delete old files if necessary.

Of course, if you use this feature often, it will invariably use up a lot of disk space with the numerous backup files. Not to worry: A convenient feature lets you choose the number of old backup files to keep, ensuring that you're constantly updated with minimal strain on your handset.

The Restore procedure is just as simple as the backup. Just fire up the feature, browse to the file from the date you want to backup, and hit 'Next' a couple of times. Hopefully, you won't have to use this feature often as it takes up a lot of time, going up to an hour!

But hey, given the peace of mind it offers, it's totally worth it.

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.dotfred.net

SyncMate

Windows Mobile to OSX, as easy as pie!

It's funny. The iPhone has sold several million units worldwide and Mac users are known to be fiercely loyal to all Apple products. Yet, a lot of such Mac fanatics – especially in India – are opting for Windows Mobile-based cell phones. Reasons among the lot we know vary from "The camera isn't good enough" and "I want a keypad" to "Dude, it's just way too expensive".

The conflict does lead to a significant problem for these users: syncing their WinMob handsets to their Mac OSX computer.

A cool tool that achieves this task with ease and grace

is SyncMate by Eltima Software. What's more, the company has been kind enough to provide a free version with basic tools; although the added features of the Expert edition do make you reach for your wallet.

Like any good synchroniser, the basic free version helps users manage their contacts, text messages, calendar entries, events and documents. The easy one-click back-up is exactly what a Mac user would be used to.

Of course, most of the popular Mac OSX 10.4 and upwards software, like iCal, Stickies, Address book etc are supported.

Primarily connected via a USB port, the cool part is that SyncMate can also hook up your WinMob phone to your Mac via WiFi. When coupled with the SMS Reader/Manager, this utility becomes an absolute treat.

Imagine this: You're sitting comfortably at your Mac, with your phone hooked up to SyncMate, when two beeps announce the arrival of a new text message. But you don't reach for the phone. You just fire up the SMS reader and check the new message! And if you're using the Expert edition, you can even quickly reply by typing through your keyboard. Sweet!

The Device Information feature is another favourite. From battery state to memory usage pie charts, you will get every tiny bit of detail you want to know about your phone's status. And yes, it even shows you what alarms you've set!



SyncMate offers every bit of detail on your phone



You can sync music and videos between your phone and your Mac

And all these utilities are boosted further with SyncMate's Expert edition. For starters, it syncs up beautifully with iTunes and iPhoto, making multimedia management easier than ever before. Images can be resized while uploading, and a built-in converter can compress videos to MPEG-4. The software is also good at synching up your browser bookmarks.

No matter what, the free edition is definitely a must-have. We think the free edition offers more than enough services, but those overly impressed can always upgrade to the Expert edition for a small fee.

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Basic edition - Free

Expert edition - \$40

Download: mac.eltima.com/sync-mac.html

www.sync-mac.com/syncmate.html

Dashwire

A holy union of mobile phones and the Web

Once in a while, a software comes along that makes you go 'Wow'. We have yet to come across something that offers as



Dashwire is your phone online. Literally

much as Dashwire, especially for its price – free!

The purpose of the application is simple: It wants to put your mobile phone onto the Internet. No, really, that's exactly what it's trying to do, syncing up every bit of data from your phone and putting it on your personal Dashwire page. It's not exactly cloud computing on your cell phone, but it comes mighty close.

Here's how it works: First, you go to **www.dashwire.com** and register yourself there. Then, you download the free application and install it on your phone. Now, it's time to sync up.

We would advise you go to a Wi-Fi hotspot for the same.

EDGE speeds are just not fast enough to sync up what will

probably be gigabytes of data, considering it takes everything from your contacts, SMSes and ringtones to your photos, songs and movies. All of this is going to be uploaded to your Dashwire account, so unless you're all right with waiting eons for your phone to send up all this data, a Wi-Fi hotspot beckons.

Starting up the application, you'll find a screen that asks you how you want to back up your data and which parts of it. We recommend you choose the 'automatically' option for syncing and put a tick in all the checkboxes – Bookmarks, calls, contacts, pictures and videos, messages, ringtones and themes, speed dials. If you do want to switch between Wi-Fi and your data account often, then go for the 'manually' option.

Enter your username and password in the login screen and you're good to go! Wait it out while the syncing is done and then head over to a computer (it's a web site, so PC, Mac or



Dashwire creates a profile of your phone based on the data the phone contains

Linux doesn't matter) to look at your phone in a web format.

It's all there, starting with a profile of your phone and yourself. Backing up your phone's data is one thing, but to back it up and access it full-time through a neat Web interface just throws up the utility factor several notches.

Hold on, though, Dashwire isn't done yet. Now that you have all this data, the Web 2.0 application would obviously want to let you take over your digital life with it.

See all those pictures? You can send them to your Flickr or Facebook account with just a couple of clicks – through your web site or your phone. Want to update your Facebook status? No problem! Time to hit that Twitter update? Tuh-dah!

The coolest part, undoubtedly, is the 'Conversations' widget that puts your SMSes with a person in a chat-like window. If you're actually having an SMS conversation, you can even send and receive SMSes directly through your Dashwire account, and they'll be synched automatically on your phone. Ah, the sweet tappity-tap of a keyboard...

It's a wonder that they managed to squeeze this great application down to a mere 218KB, and then could even afford to give it out for free! It's available on only a few platforms right now, but versions for Android, Blackberry and Symbian S60 5th Edition phones are coming soon. As for the rest, get it now!

Platforms: Symbian S60 3rd Edition, Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.dashwire.com

Synble

Remote control for Symbian phones

The Nokia PC suite that comes with any of the Nokia phones is actually quite robust and effective when it comes to creating a backup of your contacts, text messages, etc. on to your PC, so we didn't feel the need to include a software for that purpose.

However, if you are like us, the frequency with which you will connect your phone to your PC is the same as that of the Kolkata Knight Riders winning a game in the IPL. Still, we're connected to the Internet pretty often through our smart phone, so here's a handy tool that remotely backs up your personal data.

Synble – a Symbian-only application – is not as cool and

feature-rich as Dashwire for Windows Mobile, but it does get the job done at a lighter footprint. You will have to download the tool from the Synble web site to get started, and create an account on the site while you're at it.

Once installed on your phone, the software will prompt you to sign into your account and then start syncing up all your data. The program also syncs call logs, a surprising feature that makes you wonder why.

That's till the true purpose of Synble dawns on you. You see, this is not just an application that backs up your personal information to an online page. It is also a great way to check your phone's status when you forget it somewhere or misplace it, as long as it is switched on.

Suppose you left your phone at home, and are wondering who has called and what SMSes you've received. You can simply visit the Synble Web site and log in to your account to check! Since it's updated on-the-fly, you can check every aspect of your phone and even access your phone book without having your handset around. Neat!

The online page is quite neatly arranged, with 'Friends' and 'Messages' being the two main aspects. The former, of course, refers to your contacts and displays all the information regarding them. And let's not even bother describing the latter.

For Google users, Synble also links up with your Google Talk account. Hook it up, and your SMSes will be forwarded directly to your Gtalk as a message. This feature is particularly handy if you are chatting away at your computer most of the time.

And for Twitter aficionados, the application can receive tweets directly as text messages.

To sum up, it's a very handy tool to have on your Symbian



While not as feature-rich as Dashwire, Synble can sync all your important phone data online

phone. Just don't forget to start it up each time!

Platform: Symbian S60 3rd edition

Price: Free

Download: www.synble.com

1.5 – Office

QuickOffice

One of the few applications that deserves to be paid for

This Fast Track has concentrated largely on free tools and applications for smart phones. But sometimes, the freeware options just aren't good enough and you need to resort to a commercial software that gives you what you want.

When it comes to office suites, there are few people who want to mess around with a substandard freeware, no matter what OpenOffice would want you to believe. The name itself is enough to give you the reason why: It's an 'office' suite. It's for your commercial purposes. It's a small price to pay for a complete product that gives you rich dividends.

On cell phones, Windows Mobile users are lucky to find Pocket Office coming pre-installed on their handsets. But the software has skipped most other platforms, including the professional's favourite Blackberry – although it, like some Nokia phones, at least comes with a built-in document viewer. In fact, that's the status of most office suite freewares for mobile phones: they're decent readers, but can't create or edit the documents.

So where do you turn to? Our recommendation is the



Quickoffice is a robust companion when you need to work on the go

QuickOffice suite – a robust companion for those who finish up a bit of work on the go. So popular is this software that makers like Nokia and Samsung advise their customers to opt for it.



You can download it at www.quickoffice.com

One look at the software and you know why: It's so clean, crisp and polished, it puts Pocket Office to shame. Honestly, if the developers ever came out with a desktop version, we would opt for it over the Microsoft Office suite.

There are three basic applications in the QuickOffice suite – Quickword (the MS-Word equivalent), Quicksheet (the MS-Excel equivalent) and Quickpoint (the MS-PowerPoint equivalent).

The software is compatible with most office file formats, including ones from OpenOffice (ODF, etc) and the new MS Office 2007 (DOCX, XLM, etc).

It's really a simple operating interface, and anyone who has used an office suite will find themselves at home. What's more, it has a light footprint and is quite zippy overall.

The one cool part is the Quickmanager, which helps with easy upgrades and updates to the software. And with the developers working hard at it, the patches come fast.

You can even connect up your QuickOffice to your printer to easily print out your data.

It's not that QuickOffice is drastically different in any way. It just does all the little things well, and is tweaked just right to make the entire on-the-go mobile computing experience that much smoother.

And the fact that it's available across many platforms, including the iPhone, earns it extra points. A definite must-have if you plan on working on your phone.

Platforms: Symbian S60 3rd Edition (5th edition coming soon), iPhone OS, Blackberry OS (titled: eOffice), Android OS, Palm OS

Price: \$10-\$40, depending on platform

Download: www.quickoffice.com

Adobe PDF Reader Mobile

The popular PDF-viewing software is now on your mobile...

With the PDF format gaining popularity every day, the Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader is installed on almost every computer in the world. Office-goers, especially, cannot live without the software.

And with eBooks and user manuals supporting the PDF format exclusively, it's become pertinent for mobile power users to have a program that can read the files.

Thankfully, Adobe offers a mobile-friendly version of their popular tool. It is, obviously, a lot more slimmed down than its desktop counterpart, without missing out on essential features such as zoom, text search, rotate, etc.

What's more, the company has also thrown in a few new abilities that enhance mobile usage, the best of which is the support for wireless printing.

Symbian users will have to thank QuickOffice for porting the software to their platform with the free-to-use Adobe Reader LE.

It's a wise idea to have it installed on your mobile phone. You never know when you might end up needing it.

Platforms: Symbian, Palm OS, Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.adobe.com

1.6 – E-book Reader

Mobipocket eBook Reader

Take your entire library with you...

There are few better ways to pass some time than read a book. Be it while travelling, some down time at work or just to relax on a lazy Sunday afternoon, all you need is a few words to get lost in.

Still, carrying books around is not always the most convenient option, especially if you are spending your time with a 2-kg *Lord of the Rings* hardcover trilogy.

Also, these days, you often hear someone or the other talk about how they do all their reading on the computer now. They are not talking just about looking up news: eBooks are increasingly popular now and a wide variety of them is available

for your consumption.

So would it not be ideal if you could read all these eBooks on the screen of a mobile phone, your favourite travelling partner? That's where Mobipocket decided to come in with their free eBook reader.

Now, before we go on, there's a small disclaimer of sorts. Mobipocket supports only its own proprietary format of eBooks. This can be a bit of an inconvenience to most of us who have huge PDF and DOC collections.

However, the company also offers its Mobipocket Creator software for free. Running on any Windows PC, the program supports PDF, Doc and text files and quickly converts them to the Mobipocket format for easy reading on your phone.

So now that you have a collection of eBooks, you can transfer them to your phone, install Mobipocket reader and fire it up.

The interface is clean and streamlined. You can quickly browse to where your books are located (and ideally, they are already detected by the reader since they are transferred to a predefined folder, found under 'Library') and open them up.

The best part about MobiPocket immediately hits you: it's so easy to read in this! Users of large-screen handsets will especially have a blast on this. If you use any touchscreen Windows Mobile phone or one of BlackBerry's offerings, you might never go back to reading paper.

The program automatically fits the text to the width of the screen, taking care of a major problem with most eBook readers: side-scrolling. But this does not mean you have to scroll from top to bottom. Oh no no, MobiPocket wants to recreate the book-reading experience to the maximum. Just like you flip a page in a book, tapping on the right part of a touchscreen



Read ebooks on the go with Mobipocket reader

phone will go to the next page, while tapping the left will take you back to the previous one. A simple little gesture, but it goes a long way in bringing the joy of reading to the virtual world.

The company also realises that different people have different tastes, and that's why best-selling books are printed in different sizes so often. There is ample customisation on offer in Mobipocket, and allowing users to choose the font size is one of the most important features.

Here at Digit, a few of us have hawk-like eyesight, while others are a modern-day Mr. Magoo. So depending on our choice, we can avail of the option of decreasing the font size to fit more text into a single pane or increasing it so that one can read it comfortably from a distance.

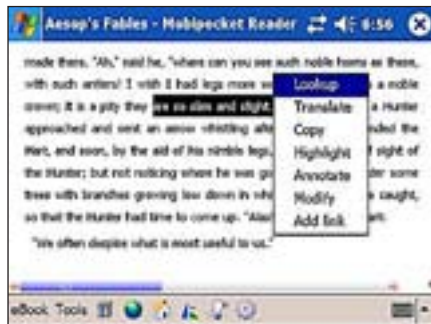
What's more, the Mobipocket reader also works in both landscape and portrait mode, rotating in any desirable direction. Users of the E90 and other communicator devices will love this feature, which can give them a long column of text to read.

But the feature unanimously declared as the best at our office was the ability to look up words in the phone's dictionary. If any word stumps you, select it and hit options to look it up. The dictionary pops up, gives you the meaning, closes and returns you to your book, letting you resume your reading. Those with a penchant for Noam Chomsky's writings might be using this feature a lot.

Also, it's not likely that one



Mobipocket in portrait mode



You can look up a dictionary using Mobipocket

finishes reading a book in one sitting. Remembering the page number is a hassle, and you can't really bend a corner to serve as a bookmark here. So Mobipocket included a bookmarking service that lets you resume reading an e-novel from the point where you last stopped. Quite handy indeed!

As for the books itself, readers can visit the company's site and buy a large collection of pre-formatted ebooks there. Alternately, if you are fine with converting books yourself using Mobipocket Creator, you can buy ebooks off services like Amazon or avail of free-to-use resources such as Project Gutenberg and Google Book Search.

It doesn't really matter how you get the books, because in the end, there's only one reader you will want to read them in.

Platforms: Palm OS, Windows Mobile, Symbian, Blackberry

Price: Free

Download: www.mobipocket.com

Note: The company is currently working on a version for all Java-based phones, and the alpha version of the software is available for download at www.mobipocket.com/dev/beta/j2me.asp. In case you are not at your screen and the URL is difficult to remember, simply type "Mobipocket reader Java" in Google and you should get a link to the page.

eReader

For the iPhone user who can't get MobiReader

Unfortunately for iPhone users, the Mobipocket Reader does not support the handset with the greatest potential as an ebook reader. Not to worry, though: ebook retailer FictionWise has come out with its own application for Apple users, simply titled 'eReader'.

This neat program was pointed out by a friend as the solution to one of his pet peeves: He prefers reading white text on a black



eReader serves the iPhone well to read ebooks

background. eReader accomplishes the task automatically, and allows you to change the font size with ease.

By default, it likes to be synched with the PDB format of ebooks found on the FictionWise Web site; but you can always load up any PDF you have lying around.

It's simple, it's easy and it gets the job done without any fuss.

Platform: iPhone

Price: Free

Download: [www.ereader.com](http://www ereader.com)

1.7 - INTERNET TOOLS

Opera Mini 4.2

If the internet is what you seek, then Opera Mini is your conduit

It's been a while since Opera released the best mobile Web browser, the Opera Mini; yet, two years since the launch, no one seems to come close to it. If we gush a bit like teenage fanboys, do be assured that it's quite well deserved.

There are a lot of things that Opera does well which no other browser seems to. One of the most significant among



Opera Mini runs on any Java-enabled phone

these is that no matter which cell phone you are using, Opera Mini will work on it. So tomorrow, if you were to change your handset for whatever reason, you would still get comfortable in at least one aspect very quickly. (Note: You do require your phone to be Java-enabled, but there are almost no smart phones that come without Java)

Installing the application, you are greeted with a welcome screen that sets a tone of ease and simplicity which is continued

throughout your browsing experience. In case you're not happy with the look, Opera Mini does allow a choice of different skins.

At the top of the screen is a URL address bar, below which is a search bar (set to Google by default, but you can customise it), followed by a Bookmarks pane – simple features that make navigation just so easy.

Visit a web page of your liking and the first thing to strike you will be how much it looks like the desktop equivalent.

Before going further into the user experience, we would like to digress just a little. The best feature of Opera Mini for us Indians is how well it handles data usage. Internet plans from cellular services are quite expensive here, with a lot of users opting for pay-by-usage schemes. Here is where Opera shines.

For starters, it uses an amazing compression engine to render Web pages for mobile phone viewing. What this means is that when you visit a page, it first sends all its data to one of Opera's servers. The server analyses and compresses this page before sending it to your phone. Not only does this save a lot of data costs, but also increases speed exponentially. According to Opera, a BBC page of 270KB that took 33 seconds to load now opens in 15 seconds at just 40KB!

The other feature that's gone a long way in speeding up browsing and cutting down costs is the cache. Hitting 'Back' is one of the most common activities in surfing; but mobile browsers used to reload the page each time. Opera Mini fixed this problem by caching the pages during your current session.

Now, back to the navigation. So you open up a page and the desktop-like layout greets you. For non-touchscreen phones,



Opera Mini offers a mouse feature that can be used to pan across a web page and zoom into a column of text

Opera Mini has added a superb feature: a mouse! You can control it's movements by using the '2', '4', '6', and '8' keys for directional input. As you move around, different elements of the page get highlighted in a red box. Hit the joystick or the '5' key to zoom in. It's an incredibly efficient way of navigating pages.

Of course, if you have a touch-sensitive screen, you can easily navigate by using the stylus and tapping the screen at a certain box to zoom in. A lot of iPhone users think that Safari beats Opera Mini hands down. Well, the former takes 10MB of memory while the latter takes about 150KB; and let's not even get into who can render customised pages faster.

After zooming in, Opera continues to be efficient by fitting the page to width, thus requiring only uni-directional scrolling. If you wish to rotate the screen and view it in landscape mode, a quick press of '*' followed by '#' will take you through.

While touchscreen phones are becoming all the rage, keypad-based phones are where Opera's core strength lies. It's hard to keep track of the browser's numerous built-in shortcuts – and some plug-ins will even increase these manifold.

The built-in RSS reader serves basic purposes; but really, there are far better RSS readers available for cell phones and we will introduce you to one shortly.

And then there's the ability to sync up with your MyOpera account, letting you transfer bookmarks and notes from your desktop PC's Opera to your Opera Mini. Nice!

However, it's not all perfect. The biggest folly is its horrible rendering of YouTube. It's not that Opera can't open the videos, it's just that it's a messy, clunky experience (full-screen viewing, in particular, is an absolute nightmare). The Oslo-based company has issued patch after patch to try and rectify this, but it's nowhere near good enough. Still, we have other tools to serve that purpose, so this one slight is forgivable.

Overall, there is not a single mobile browser that can challenge Opera Mini. SkyFire is a good alternative if you're hell-bent on not installing Opera, and Mozilla's Fennec is still at an incumbent stage to stage any rivalry.

Final verdict? If your phone doesn't have Opera Mini installed, you need to do some serious introspection.

Platforms: Java

Price: Free

Download: www.opera.com/mini
SkyFire

Web 2.0 meets smart phone

While our unconditional love for Opera Mini is quite apparent, we do get an itch to watch a few videos every now and then. That's when we resort to our mistress: SkyFire.

As noted, Opera Mini's rendering of online videos is, to put it mildly, pathetic. The best analogy to give for SkyFire would be that it's the 'Google Chrome' to the world of mobile Web browsers. And like the search giant, it refuses to get rid of the 'beta' tag at the end of each product release and update.

SkyFire's rendering of videos is magnificent, especially since it has the latest Flash plug-in built into its architecture and also

comes with Microsoft's Silverlight and Apple QuickTime plug-ins (that's right, no extra download). Videos from YouTube, Hulu, MetaCafe and even some major sites like Rediff load without any issue whatsoever.

What's more, the browser even allows you to download some of these video files! For a cell phone where data costs are always an issue, that's a very handy feature to have. And yes, this ability is extended to some audio files as well.

As is evident, the focus on Web 2.0 takes centre stage with



Skyfire brings Web 2.0 to your mobile phone



Watching videos online is a breeze using this browser. It offers a rich multimedia experience

SkyFire. The home screen itself is proof of this, with a window that displays four tabs: RSS Feeds, Search, Bookmarks and History.

The first tab with the RSS is where the browser shines. It automatically integrates feeds from several popular sites (Google News, Yahoo News, YouTube, Digg, Hulu, etc) and also combines two of the most popular social networking services – Twitter and Facebook. Of course, you will have to log in to avail of the latter two, but it's an absolute treat to use. And this is only bolstered by the addition of a little text bar on top that lets you update your status on the fly.

The Search tab is basically a directory of popular services, while Bookmarks and History are self-explanatory.

Like Google Chrome, SkyFire has added a 'superbar' at the top – a URL address bar that doubles up as a search bar.

And taking a few tips from Opera Mini, it has also thrown in a remote server to compress the data and an engine that fits a desktop-style web page to the mobile screen.

SkyFire doesn't support as many devices as Opera Mini does, but we recommend you install both on your smart phone if it is so compatible: Use Opera for your regular browsing and SkyFire for all your Web 2.0 needs. And Blackberry users – it's coming soon to your favourite platform!

Platforms: Windows Mobile, Symbian S60 3rd edition

Price: Free

Download: get.skyfire.com

Skweezelt

Convert any web link to a mobile-friendly page

While Opera Mini is a great browser and serves all the required purposes, the problem with having a Windows Mobile interface is that for a lot of applications, links will still open in



When you need to compress a page – Skweezelt

Internet Explorer by default.

Smartphone users are painfully aware of the shortcomings of IE, the biggest of which is opening a full-size Web page. Honestly, it's like something unearthly takes over the browser, as it sputters and gasps to fulfill the simplest of tasks.

Programmer John Cody of OmniSoft got tired of going through the same on his handset and decided to create a simple tool that should be put onto every single WinMob phone without a second thought.

The idea is simple: If you're opening any link – be it from an email in Outlook or from an RSS feed – Skweezelt will offer to compress the page to a mobile-friendly layout, making it easy on your Internet Explorer.

However, you can still opt to view the original page if you so desire. When you click on a link, the application pops up and asks you whether you want to “Skweezelt”. Choosing ‘Yes’ will perform the appropriate compression, while ‘No’ takes you to the default page as-is.

Now, installing Skweezelt is a bit of a tricky issue, as there's no CAB file for the same. It requires a few simple changes in the Windows Mobile registry, and we advise you do the same only if you're comfortable with it. Additionally, if you do decide to use it, please remember to back up your registry first.

Thankfully, Cady was helpful enough to list detailed instructions on Omnisoft's forum, and even replies to any troubles you may encounter.

Still, Skweezelt is definitely worth the one-time installation hassle: The page loads quicker, you save on bandwidth, and it's easier to read. It's simply great!

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.omnisoft.com

Google Suite

No Android? No problem! All of Google's mobile-based programs are available for your phone...

Sometimes, it's a bit frightening to realise how just big Google is. It is the biggest search engine in the world by a factor of at least five, it has got one of the most popular email services in



Google brings all of its services and applications to almost all mobile platforms

the world, it has the largest video-sharing site ever made, it owns one of the most widely-used social networking sites (especially in India), it has the largest blogging space available on the Internet, and it has the best geological mapping tool released to the public. And all of this is without even counting a lot of the Silicon Valley company's other applications, such as its foray into browsers, instant messaging, photo-sharing services, RSS readers, news aggregation services, etc.

Predicting the trend that Internet access was slowly shifting towards mobile phones, Google developed a lot of tools that work on almost every cell phone out there. The biggest leap, of course, was the development of a new open-source operating system, dubbed Android.

The OS has received rave reviews from all quarters thus far, and it's only a matter of time before it is ported to run on computers. Reports are already coming in about how netbook manufacturers (especially Acer) are testing the system on the popular Aspire One line of laptop devices. More on these issues can be found later; for now, let's focus on Google's applications for cell phones.

Going over to the official web site for all Google-related downloads, you are first prompted to choose your device type. All the major brands and platforms are listed there, making the task a lot easier.

Once you select your phone/platform, you will be taken to a page that lists all the Google applications available for your perusal.

Google Search: The backbone that the entire company was built on is available in an easy-to-use search bar. With the help of the Google Mobile App suite, this can be put on your Today screen, letting you conduct a search query without having to open any application. Of course, once you do search, the program will open your default browser to display the results.

Gmail: This email service is now available on your mobile phone. If you do use the service with the Google Gears for mobile tool, some operating systems will allow you offline access of your Gmail inbox. However, this takes up a huge part of your disk space, so tread carefully.

YouTube: The amazing video-sharing service that changed the world is not right at your fingertips. Sure, the company had fiddled around with Google Video earlier, but once they realised they could not compete with YouTube, they resorted to the old adage: 'If you can't beat them, buy them out'. The YouTube for Mobile application is quite a well-rounded player and serves its purpose. However, given a choice, we would still go with emTube as it allows one to save videos if need be and has, in our opinion, a better interface.

Google Maps: For those seeking global positioning services, there is not a better application out there. With the launch of Google Earth, the company brought GPS and geo-mapping to

computers everywhere. Now, they have taken it up a notch with Google Maps for mobile. The software works mainly through A-GPS (using cell phone towers) to pinpoint your location and provide directions. The maps for India have been updated to a large extent, given the thriving community of users; a few niggles still remain, but they are not significant enough to dismiss this wonderful tool.

Google Latitude: Launched recently, Latitude latches on to Google Maps and makes it more awesome than you ever thought possible. In layman's terms, Latitude tracks your location at all points and shows it on another user's Google Maps. You can set how accurately the software pinpoints you by letting it show a 200-metre circle around where you are; show the city you are in; or, for privacy concerns, not track you at all. Tracking a person with their cell phone isn't always a Big Brother scenario. If your kids have a phone, you would be quite glad to know where they are. "Whr r u?" is the most common SMS we send anyway, so why not find out without the hassle of back-and-forth messages.

Google Calendar: Most phones these days come with a built-in calendar that lets you set birthdays, appointments, etc. But wouldn't you rather have a single calendar database that is always in sync and can be accessed from any device? Having used Google Calendar for ages, we can vouch for its feature-rich interface and awesome performance. And now, you can carry this wonderful utility with you, ensuring you never miss an important date again. The Calendar on your phone and online account can be synced automatically by using Google Sync; although we recommend you try out the GCalSync (www.gcalsync.com) and GooSync (www.goosync.com) tools. GCalSync has versions for two platforms: Blackberry and Java, ensuring it works on almost any phone. We prefer GooSync while running a Windows Mobile phone, although the software is compatible with all Java-based phones as well.

Google News: To always be updated about what's happening in the world, there are few services that match the aggregation abilities of Google News. The mobile version is just a resized

output of the original service, and is just as customizable. *Google Reader*: RSS feeds are all the rage, and Google has come out with a Reader to help you streamline the different feeds you follow. If you use RSS minimally, it makes sense to use the built-in reader that comes with the Google Mobile App suite instead of installing additional software that take up precious memory. However, for power users, a dedicated RSS reader would be a better idea as Google Reader is limited in many ways.

Orkut: The popular social networking service – owned by Google – has got quite a following in India. Here's a simple application to post your scraps and find out what your friends are up to.

Picasa: If you don't already have an account at a photo-sharing service, Picasa is a great option to go for. One of the biggest reasons is that it is integrated with most of Google's offerings, taking away registration and other such worries while providing easy cross-platform access. And if you do have an account on Flickr or some other service, here's some food for thought: Picasa's online account can easily import those settings and data as well. Time for a switch?

Google Sync: As the name suggests, this is an easy tool that syncs up your mobile phone's content with your online Google profile. Primarily, the application works only with your Google Calendar and Outlook or email address book. However, the developers have stated that they are adding more features to make it such that your personalised Google 'suite' will be available to you from any device.

Google Mobile App: The aforementioned applications are all available in one easy-to-use package for some platforms – Windows Mobile, Blackberry and iPhone. In Windows Mobile, the program puts a Google toolbar on your Today screen, with launchers for all the Google applications. As for the other two platforms, it waits to be launched via an icon. The cool part is that the program is voice-activated, allowing users to conduct searches and perform basic tasks by just talking into the phone! Support for Symbian and other platforms is coming soon.

Our more tech-savvy readers will know we skipped quite a few of Google's mobile products, such as Gtalk, Docs, iGoogle, Blogger, SMS, etc. While these are all available, their interface isn't good enough to warrant a recommendation. In fact, there are various other applications that can do their job a lot better, such as the Java-based GoTalkMobile (www.gotalkmobile.com), which beats any official Google Talk client.

Still, most of Google's offerings are not to be ignored. If you are a Google power-user on your PC or Mac but thought that the experience just wouldn't translate well on cell phones, then we highly recommend you check out the mobile applications suite. You are in for a pleasant surprise...

Platforms: Android, Windows Mobile, iPhone, Blackberry, Symbian S60, Java

Price: Free

Download: www.google.com/mobile

emTube

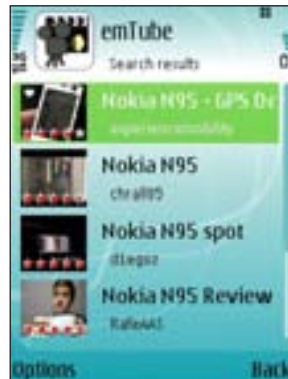
The holy grail for a YouTube fan

Symbian users should count themselves very, very lucky indeed, for they have got the best YouTube browsing application for a non-iPhone handset.

There's really nothing more to emTube than going around YouTube and watching the plethora of videos available. But really, at times, that's all you want.

The interface is clean and straightforward, with no fancy effects. First off, you have to choose from a few self-explanatory options to get started: Search, Featured, Top Rated and Most Viewed.

The results are presented in a very easy-to-operate listed layout, with a thumbnail of the video on the left, along with the video rating; the title of the video next to it; and the author's name below the title. An 'Options' tab offers more details



The best YouTube app for the Symbian platform

if needed. Depending on the resolution of your phone, four to eight videos will fit on the screen at a time.

Select the video you want and hit 'OK' to start streaming the clip. You have the option of viewing the video in portrait or landscape mode, with the latter being quite handy for fullscreen viewing.

One of the best features of emTube is how easy it is to save a video with the program. Once you select a video and its window opens up, just hit the 'Options' button again avail of the 'Save' feature in it. The video will be saved as an FLV file on your phone and can be viewed in emTube itself by quickly scanning your drive for FLV videos.

All in all, it's an absolutely rocking application that would make non-Symbian users quite jealous indeed.

Platforms: Symbian S60 3rd edition

Price: Free

Download: www.emtube.com.cn



emTube offers plenty of options to viewing a video

NimBuzz

A superb all-in-one messenger, combining chat with social networking

With smartphones in India being increasingly connected to EDGE and GPRS via unlimited data packages, the use of always-on instant messengers (IM) on phones has gone up.

One of the most popular software for handset-based IMs has been Nimbuzz; with **GetJar.com** recently reporting that it has served out 10 million downloads



Nimbuzz connects to all popular chat services

of the application so far.

At its core, Nimbuzz is an all-in-one messenger, combining various popular instant messaging and social networking services into one software for easy access. Through this application, users can log in to their Google Talk, Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Skype, AIM and even MySpace and Facebook accounts.

Once you install the program – a pretty hefty piece, clocking in over 2MB – it prompts you to sign in to your different accounts as well as the default Nimbuzz account you are obliged to create.

An eye-pleasing interface greets you with The Buddy List – a single pane that combines the contacts from all the services you have signed in to. Next to each buddy's name sits the logo of the service he or she is accessing and their online/offline status, providing a better clue for you as to what's happening. Special note should be made of the addition of Facebook and MySpace contacts for quick chatting – an incredibly useful feature.

You can sort the Buddy List by favourites, such that the people you talk to most often show up at the top of the list. Quite handy, that!

The self-explanatory Chats tab has all the ongoing conversations as all as new incoming messages. And we tend to express ourselves quite a bit while chatting, so the addition of emoticons brought a smiley to our face. Forgive the pun, please.

The program also supports offline messaging, but really,



It's available for all major devices...



...and even connects you to Facebook!

wouldn't you rather just send an SMS? Still, for those who would like to save the 50 paise, you can 'Buzz' a friend on any of the services.

One of the best parts about NimBuzz is that it allows for voice chats. That's right, you can actually talk to someone over the phone for free, while they're on a PC – provided they're online at the same time as you are! Still, on GPRS and EDGE connections, this makes for quite a lousy experience as the voice delay is too high. But if you do happen to be in a Wi-Fi hotspot, yap away without a care in the world.

Data transfers are another aspect of Nimbuzz that make you sit up and take notice. Who needs MMS and email attachments when you can just send a file across to a friend so easily! From personal experience, we can vouch that this is especially helpful when it comes to sharing a quick photograph.

Still, at the end of the day, it's an out-and-out instant messaging device and does that job very well indeed. There are other applications that give it strong competition, such as Fring, Mundu IM, IM+ and eBuddy; but without a second thought, we'd recommend Nimbuzz for sheer ease and accessibility. Given that it's compatible with such a large gamut of cell phones, a change in your handset will still bring you to a familiar environment very quickly.

Platforms: Symbian S60, Java,

Windows Mobile, iPhone OS

Price: Free

Download: www.nimbuzz.com
get.nimbuzz.com

TwitterBerry

The definitive Twitter client for Blackberry phones

The popularity of Twitter cannot be denied. It seems that just about everyone has an account these days and are almost addicted to it. It probably won't be long before we see a 'Twitterholics Anonymous'.

While there are quite a few mobile phone clients for the social messaging



TwitterBerry is the best out there



Status updates...



...Friends Timelines...

service, including the ubiquitous Tiny Twitter, we do feel a little envious of BlackBerry users. The best application we have seen has been developed solely for devices designed by Research In Motion.

Without any hyperbole, TwitterBerry is fantastic. Perhaps it's the fact that it's running on the rich BlackBerry platform that makes it look better than all its competitors, but really, it's a mystery how it manages to look so good while having such a streamlined interface.

Of course, you will have to start with installing the application, either through your PC via USB or directly over the Internet. Once you see the little 't' icon on your display, you are good to go.

Fire it up and the program will prompt you to enter your Twitter username and password. After logging in, TwitterBerry first imports all your latest updates and then shows off its home screen – it's like a miniaturised version of Twitter! Absolutely marvelous!

... and of course Tweets --
TwitterBerry handles it all

The bar at the top asks you the question you have been asked so many times: “What are you doing?” A small counter at the bottom reads “Characters available: 140” and goes down in real-time as you start typing out your status message. Hit the trackball when you are finished and the message is posted.

Pressing the menu key throws up a plethora of options, the best of which is the Friends timeline – a tiny window that lists what your friends are doing, one after the other. While you can easily send personal messages and replies (just hit the trackball on a friend’s name and you’re ready to go), TwitterBerry restricts you from adding new friends.

The integration with TwitPic is also a great addition. ShoZu is a great application and does integrate a wide gamut of photo-sharing services; but if you are going to be sharing the images you click with your phone only on Twitter, then TwitterBerry is all you will be needing. Go to a photo, open the options and choose ‘Send to TwitterBerry’.

You can also view your entire set of messages with ‘Get Replies’. As noted earlier, the application syncs up with your online account, so it’s always updated.

And in case you want to know who is doing what in the world at large, the public timeline has also been thrown in. Thankfully, this refreshes only when you access it, saving a lot of potential data costs!

All in all, TwitterBerry is an absolute must-have if you Tweet. Yes, yes, we know that Twitter is meant to be used with SMSes anyway. But why would you want to do that when there’s such a great application available for it which offers so much more than an SMS ever would?

Platforms: Blackberry

Price: Free

Download: www.orangatame.com/products/twitterberry/
www.orangatame.com/

Tiny Twitter

Tweet from any phone, without the SMS costs

We love Twitter. It is great fun to keep sending all those SMSes, constantly updating to our latest status. Then our mobile carrier sent us our phone bill and taught us a simple lesson in mathematics: A lot of 50 paise text messages add up to a lot of rupees!

Yes, we love Twitter. And while we are not going to be buying a BlackBerry phone to avail of the fantabulous TwitterBerry, we do need some application to manage our social messaging.

Tiny Twitter said it could do what we wanted and work on just about any mobile phone, so we gave it a whirl.

The application is quite aptly named, with a size of just under 750KB. Installation and set-up was a breeze and we were ready to start Tweeting in virtually no time at all.

Overall, it's a pleasing experience, and is a lot like TwitterBerry in many ways: The home screen for the status updates; friends' and personal timelines; direct messages; customisable refresh times, etc. Tiny Twitter does it all and does it well enough. As of this writing, there isn't support for TinyPic; but developer Kevin Cawley says he is working on that.

As we mentioned before, it doesn't look as inviting as TwitterBerry, but then again, no application does. So for pure functionality and accessibility, Tiny Twitter is a great tool.

Platforms: Windows Mobile, Java

Price: Free

Download: www.tinytwitter.com



Tiny Twitter lets you chat without the SMS cost attached

iFob

Social networking actually gets social

There are so many people that malign Facebook and other social networking sites for destroying the fabric of human social interaction. While we argue vehemently with them, there is a valid point somewhere in their rants. Social networking while at your computer still does not provide live human contact.

But what if the two were to be merged? What if social networking was an activity to be done on-the-go, which let you

meet new and interesting people at any place, any time? The premise is very interesting, and developers iCloseBy have sought to explore it with the iFob.

The iPhone application allows you to create a profile page, just like you would on any social network. Fire up the program, fill in the necessary details (name, sex, location, etc) and step out into the world.

You will need to be at a Wi-Fi hotspot for iFob to work its charm.

What it does is simple: If any other iFob user is nearby, both of you will get an alert from the application. The idea is that you read each other's profiles and meet each other if you so desire.

For those who frequent pubs and clubs, the iFob could be an amazing tool to have. If meeting new people is the purpose of social networking, then this application does it in a more personalised way than any other.

Platform: iPhone

Price: Free

Download: icloseby.com



iFob creates a local network of people you can interact with

JoikuSpot Light

A simple application that turns your cell phone into a WiFi hotspot!

One of our friends has a constant gripe with his Symbian piece. You see, he has subscribed for an unlimited data plan with his cellular service and enjoys the Internet access while travelling. But he has also recently purchased a netbook.



JoikuSpot Light lets you wirelessly share your phone's data service

He wanted to use his cell phone's Internet on the netbook. His wish was our command, and we were able to easily fulfill it by connecting the phone to the device via the USB cord.

Demanding fellow that he is, now he wants to do the same without the chord! It's too much of a hassle to carry it around, he says.

After a bit of browsing, we landed on a great little tool that served his purpose. JoikuSpot Light takes your cell phone's Internet connection and easily makes it available over WiFi to any device that seeks to connect. Essentially, the tool turns your mobile phone into a WiFi hotspot (or a WLAN, to be precise)!

All you need to do is install the application on your phone, choose an 'access point' (the Internet service you will be using) and you're done.

Now, when our friend fires up his JoikuSpot Light, his laptop detects the connection as an available WiFi access point in the network. Connect and start surfing!

There are a few limitations, though: For one, the freeware 'Light' version supports only HTTP browsing. So while you will be able to surf the Web with ease, you can't use it for accessing your email clients.

The premium version fixes this little issue and also

reconnects automatically in case the network gets disconnected. The latter doesn't sound like a big deal till the frustration of a broken network while uploading or downloading a file hits you square in the gut.

Platform: Symbian S60

Price: Free

Download: www.joiku.com

1.8 – Multimedia

KD Player

One MP3 player to rule them all

It was the Walkman that started it all. The ability to listen to one's own music while on the move was unheard of before Sony popularized a compact device which let you play your audio tapes – any place, any time.

Then, Apple came along with the iPod and changed the game. Cassettes were out, MP3s were in. The device got smaller, sleeker, friendlier. The next frontier was obviously the mobile phone.

Before the iPhone became a reality, Sony Ericsson and Nokia had already come out with a fair share of mobile phones dedicated to playing back MP3 songs. And the increasing sales of the XpressMusic and Walkman phone series only bolsters the popularity of this medium.

But enjoying a musical experience is as much about the software as it is about the hardware. Sure, with horrible headphones or a output abilities, you won't ever enjoy your tunes. However, you need a good software that is easy to use, decodes your songs well and lets you relax



KD Player is the MP3 player of choice for mobile phones with small screens



...and it comes with themes!

while doing all the work intuitively. And it has to do all of that while being light and efficient. It's why WinAmp has so many more followers than a Windows Media Player or iTunes.

On the mobile phone side of things, KD Player has been the king of this sector. The program is meant primarily for regular Java-based phones, although it will work on most Windows Mobile and other high-end smartphones. If you are using a handset with a screen resolution no bigger than 240x320 pixels, this is the player to use.

KD Player does nothing that can be considered out of the ordinary. You install the small file (less than 150KB) and start it up to see a simple interface that users of Sony Ericsson phones will especially find quite homely.

Hit the Menu button and browse to where you have all your songs stored. KD Player will scan the folder and put your tracks in its library for easy access.

The support for ID3 tags is a boon, as you do not have to spend any time renaming your files. And if you have added album artwork to the ID3 of the music file, KD Player can read and display that too. Alternately, artwork from the album's folder can also be shown on screen.

Once you start the song, KD Player has a simple interface that shows the artist's name; the album; the track title; its duration along with a progression bar; and the bit rate at which it is playing. The '4', '5' and '6' keys on your keypad can be used for previous track/rewind; play/pause; and next track/forward respectively.

You can also create playlists with KD Player, and save them for future use.

The best part, though, is that it can run safely in the background without taking up too much RAM. We recommend you assign a hotkey for the player if your phone allows for it. This way, you can fire it up when necessary, make the necessary changes, and minimise it to continue with your work. KD Player can also access the dedicated music keys on most phones.

The player is extremely popular online, so you can find a lot of help, tips and tricks regarding it. A little bit of searching will also throw up various skins and skin packs to jazz up the looks.

So pop in those earphones, sit back and enjoy!

Platforms: Java

Price: Free

Download: kdplayer.webs.com

www.easter-eggs.net.ru/KDPlayer/EN_Versions.php

Microfi Nitrogen MP3 Player

Finally, a full-fledged MP3 player that gets rid of the pesky stylus

It's been two years since the iPhone released. Two years of the best music interface on a cell phone. And what does Windows



Nitrogen is the go-to music player for Windows Mobile users

Mobile have to retaliate? Please, don't even think of saying the three dreaded letters: 'WMP'.

We are so thankful for the existence of the XDA developers forum. It consistently gets good programmers who come out with free-to-use applications that are leaps and bounds ahead of any commercial software.

Microfi, a regular member at the forum, decided he had enough of the lack of good music players for the WinMob platforms

and started creating his own. Within no time, he presented the community with the Microfi Nitrogen, which has quickly become one of the most downloaded MP3 players for pocket PCs.

The biggest selling point of the Nitrogen is that it was intended to use purely with one's fingers. The stylus has hampered Windows Mobile users for too long, especially when it comes to tiny keys on media players. The big fat keys on the Nitrogen ensure that you will always, always, always hit what you intended to.

The menu, in fact, is what drew us to Nitrogen in the first place. It was simplistic, good-looking, and devoid of any delusions of grandeur. There was no pretending that this was a project for fun's sake, and whatever utility that came out of it was a bonus.

Another attractive factor was the speed of the application. Nitrogen opens so fast, it makes you wonder whether it was running in the background all the time. Of course, this could be largely due to its small size, clocking in less than 2MB of storage.

The advantage of working in a community is the amount of rapid feedback a developer gets, as well as the help offered. Programmers are often not designers, and vice-versa. But in a community, you're bound to find someone with a basic knowledge of one area and an expertise in the other. Before you knew it, Nitrogen had some great skins to go with its default one.

But let's not get too superficial, and turn our gaze to what's under the hood. Nitrogen uses the open-source MAD decoder for its high-quality MP3 playback, delivering crisp audio. The OGG playback is taken care of by the OVD decoder.

The playlists are very handy, letting you add files with ease and change the order on-the-fly. The 'Repeat' and 'Shuffle' options are just icing on the cake.

Initially, Nitrogen came without an equaliser function. But Microfi was quick to rectify this issue, and Nitrogen now has a robust equalizer with 10 presets and a customisable option.

The one feature it's still missing is fast-forward and rewind, although Microfi promises he's currently working on this and should have it figured out soon.

Our recommendation? Even without that one feature, it's the

best WinMob MP3 playback tool around and deserves to be the default player on your handset.

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: code.google.com/p/microfi-nitrogen/downloads/list

Mundu Radio

Sick of FM? Try out some Internet Radio

Have you ever thought that all the radio stations in India sound the same? You switch from a RadioMirchi to a Red FM, and you could swear that it was the same RJ yapping away on both the stations.

And if you have a penchant for non-Bollywood or non-Indipop music, there is simply no solace for you. When was the last time you heard “classic rock” being played on one of the stations without it slipping into Nirvana and Pearl Jam?

A viable alternative to this are the several Internet radio stations on offer. You will invariably get the music of your choice, a good playlist to listen to and, sometimes, even an RJ who knows what he’s talking about.

To access Internet radio, you need a decent player. Geodesic, who came out with the wonderful Mundu IM, has also launched an Internet radio player, called Mundu Radio.



Tune into internet radio using Mundu



After registering on the site, download the application and install it on your phone. Fire it up, log in and you're good to go.

You can choose from a variety of stations on offer, broken down by their genre: Acoustic, Rock, Pop, Indian, Classical – it's all here. The service even lets you add a preferred Internet radio of your choice, although this will have to be done on your online account and then synched with the phone.

A GPRS connection suffices for most needs, although an EDGE or WiFi connection is recommended. And if you're among the few in India with 3G-enabled phones, that's even better!

For the lower GPRS-EDGE kind of speeds, it is advisable to stick to stations that air songs at lower bitrates, preferably 32kbps and below. But if you're going to be doing the majority of your listening over 3G or WiFi, then feel free to go with the full 128kbps songs.

Platforms: Blackberry, Symbian, Windows Mobile, Palm OS

Price: Free

Download: www.mundu.com

TCPMP

One of the best media players for mobile phone

Come on admit it, it's the first thought that raced ahead of all others when you first laid eyes on a cell phone with a large touchscreen: "Wouldn't it be awesome to watch a movie on this while travelling around?" Watching Seinfeld in the bus, one of Sachin's best innings on a train, or every bit of Pulp Fiction during a short flight – ah, this is the life!

Windows Mobile does come with a default slimmed-down version of the Windows

Media Player; but honestly, no tech enthusiast would be caught dead using that bloated and useless piece of garbage. The lack



TCPMP might not look like much, but it delivers in spades and then some

of support for a lot of codecs, the horrible menu system, the utterly clunky navigation – WMP has more going against it than for it.

So of course, an alternative was required. It wasn't long before programmer Gabor Kovacs came out with the free and open-source The Core Pocket Media Player (TCPMP).



The player can play almost every video codec under the sun

The player is so feature-rich and well polished, it's difficult to know where to start. If we really had to pick, the best part would be the wide gamut of formats it supports: AVI (both DivX and Xvid), MKV, MP4, M4A, OGG, OGM, ASF and WMV (on Windows Mobile devices).

The lack of FLV might disturb some, especially given the format's popularity these days with YouTube and other online video-sharing sites. Worry not, though. There's a simple plug-in that offers a workaround, available at www.mobytube.net. There's also a WMV plug-in, which some Palm users have had success with.

The videos can be played off the phone's built-in memory or any memory card you fit in. A simple menu control scheme goes a long way in enhancing the usability. It's not meant to be used without a stylus, but we found it pretty easy anyway.

Tap the 'Play' button with your thumb to start your video, and tap it again to stop it. The 'Full' button will take you to full-screen mode while tapping the screen again will pause the video. And of course, the slider bar for the video's footage completes the navigation package.

The videos play flawlessly, offering rich colours and good sound quality. A small 'Preferences' button offers volume control, playback speed, display settings and other options.

TCPMP also offers the option of creating a playlist, although it's not as robust as that of most other media players. For once, even Windows Media Player scores better in a department! Still, it's handy enough to queue up your media, be it videos, songs

or pictures.

Oh yes, the other formats! TCPMP can be used as a full-fledged MP3 player too and also supports other audio codecs such as OGG Vorbis, AC3 and WMA (on Windows Mobile devices).

And the latest version of the program can also be used to view your photos, supporting JPEG, TIFF and PNG images. It's really a very basic image-viewer, and there are much better options that you can pursue.

The jaw-dropping part about the TCPMP is the almost-negligible footprint. At only 627KB, it's an absolute gem of a software!

Kovacs has stopped further development of the software now, and is working on releasing a commercial media player for both mobiles as well as desktop PCs, called The Core Player. So rush and grab TCPMP before he decides to pull the hook on all available downloads!

Platforms: Palm OS, Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: picard.exceed.hu/tcpmp/test/

DivX Player Mobile

A rich movie player from the guys who started it all...

Symbian users are lucky to have the robust Nokia media player packaged with their phone. Indeed, its support for different file formats and easy control scheme makes for quite a great player. As for Windows Mobile users, we curse them daily for having phones compatible with TCPMP.

Still, in case you aren't happy with either of those players and seek a viable alternative, then you might want to check out DivX Player Mobile.

Developed by DivX – the



The DixX Player Mobile app...



...brings DivX playback to your phone

guys who invented that lovely codec we all use – the player is a slimmed-down version of the popular desktop software. You will be made to register on the site before downloading the player, but you can always circumvent this part since the player is freely available on thousands of pages across the Web.

Fully compatible with both touchscreen and non-touchscreen phones, the program has surprisingly small keys that can be operated with the stylus or a keypad. We pity the touchscreen users here, because it's quite a pain to access the keys. Hopefully, future versions of the program will fix this.

The program supports all DivX, AVI and MPEG files, and can automatically scan your phone's memory to throw up compatible files.

The reason we are recommending this player is because of the display settings it offers. No mobile screen is the same as another, and brightness and contrast vary a lot. DivX Player's ability to alter such settings makes for much clearer picture-viewing.

Platforms: Symbian, Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.divx.com/mobile

XnView Pocket

The only photo management tool you'll ever need

Believe it or not, this pocket PC application actually has more features than most full-fledged Windows desktop tools! A virtual Swiss army knife for the photo management, XnView Pocket comes with the kitchen sink.

After installing the application, it prompts you to browse to a folder with pictures. There are five viewing modes on offer and we highly recommend you try out the Filmstrip view when browsing. Alternately, if you want some information on the pictures, the Detail view will show you a thumbnail preview of the photo,



The best photo viewer...

along with its resolution, date of creation, file format and size on disk.

There's also a cool slideshow option to view the images, with great transition effects. If you're planning to view a series of pictures in landscape orientation, this way is quite pleasing to the eye.

Now, all of this is good and useful, but it's nothing out of the ordinary. That's till you take a peek at the kind of tools that XnView offers.

Want to convert an image? Well, you can swap between different image formats, such as JPEG, GIF, BMP and PNG (TIFF and RAW files are read-only). If it's cropping that you desire, simply use your stylus to draw out a box and cut the image to size. Resizing, rotating, sharpening, smoothing, noise reduction, brightness, contrast, gamma, RGB controls – XnView just does it all!

The absolutely amazing part is that it supports batch conversion and renaming. And really, it's a lot easier when you're working with a touch-sensitive screen and a stylus. Smartphone users need not worry though, because the software works on non-touchscreen phones too.

If that's not enough, XnView comes with a built-in screen capture and editor tool as well.

And now that you have your edited, cropped and renamed pictures, there's obviously only one thing left to do: e-mail them to your friends. Well, the program can help you out there too, with a built-in tool to send out emails through your WinMob email accounts.

It took us a really long time to find a software on the PC that did all these features, and with XnView, they're all here on a tiny little Pocket PC!

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.xnviewpocket.org



...resize, crop, rotate. XnView can do it all!

S2V

Flick and view, ala iPhone!

There's really not much else to S2V – short for Slide to View – than the fact that it's meant to emulate the finger-flicking way of picture browsing, as done on the iPhone. Of course, there's no multitouch support, so the navigation pad is still paramount to zooming in (up arrow) and out (down arrow). Sliding your finger from left to right will scroll through the images in a folder, while sliding from the top of the screen to the bottom at the edges will rotate the pictures. The cool way of viewing pictures is here for WinMob users!

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.ac-s2.com

ShoZu

A must-have for every shutterbug's phone

These days, it seems like every passing season adds another digit to the megapixel count of cameras on mobile phones. Even the most basic phones come with a VGA camera now. In fact, this has made life quite difficult for people who aren't allowed to carry camera-equipped phones at their office.

Still, there's a reason so many phones are coming with cameras: it's that people really, really, really like to click photographs!



A must-have for any shutterbug – ShoZu

Also, a lot of camera-touting users are quite Web-savvy, and have accounts on photo-sharing sites, blogs and social networks.

ShoZu seeks to be a conduit to easily upload the pictures you click on your cell phone to your online life. What's more, it's compatible with almost every handset out there!

Setting it up is a bit of a process, but it's worthwhile. For the sake of an example, let us suppose you have a Flickr account. First, you go over to the ShoZu web site, download the application compatible with your phone and install it. The site already supports accounts from a few popular photo-sharing services, and Flickr is one among them – saving you the trouble of registering all over again.

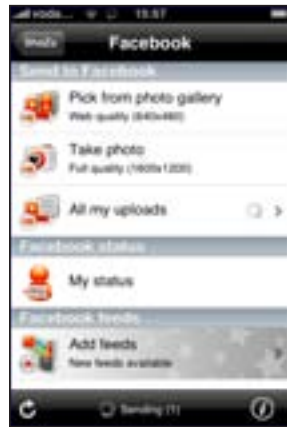
Fire up the application and proceed to your camera. Hold it up, click a picture and wait for just a second – there it is! ShoZu's dialogue box pops up, asking if you want to upload the just-clicked photo to your Flickr page.

Now, if you have multiple services to upload to, you can choose from a quick list that pops up; but if you're a single-service user, then you can even set ShoZu to automatically upload all pictures you click.

Apart from Flickr, the program supports Picasa, Photobucket, Facebook, Twitter, TwitPic, Blogger, LiveJournal, WordPress, YouTube, Friendster, etc. And you can also add in a few email addresses too! Imagine clicking a picture of your friend and instantly sending it to his or her inbox. Neat, eh?

Now, there are some additions you can make to the photo, if you so desire. For starters, basic details can be added to the photo, such as title, tag, description, etc. And if you have a GPS-enabled phone, then geo-tagging is supposed by the application.

Honestly, given the wide range of phones and services that it supports, it would be criminal not to have ShoZu installed on your handset.



ShoZu allows you to upload to multiple photo-sharing services

Platform: Symbian, Windows Mobile, iPhone, all Java-based phones

Price: Free

Download: www.shozu.com

1.9 – Games

Pocket Uno [Windows Mobile]

Uno, the popular card game, has been around for almost 40 years now, and thankfully, someone decided to make a Windows Mobile version for us to enjoy. The rules are the same as the regular game – match the colour or number of the card being played in the centre of the screen and try to get rid of all your cards before anyone else. Pocket Uno allows you to customise the difficulty level (easy, normal, hard) of each of your three opponents. Playable in portrait or landscape mode, the graphics of Pocket Uno are simple and streamlined. Your cards are displayed in a line at the bottom of the screen, while your opponents sit at the other three sides of the screen. In the middle is the open card, next to which is the pile to draw cards from. Beginners might want to switch on the ‘Highlight playable cards’ option till they get the hang of things. As addictive as its real-life counterpart, Pocket Uno is an absolute blast.



Uno for Windows Mobile OS

Platform: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: programaro.ru

KevTris [Windows Mobile]

While you need to pay for the official version of Tetris for Windows Mobile, there are enough freeware alternatives available. The best one we found was KevTris, developed by

programmer Kevin Hsu. The game offers most of the features that the popular block-dropping original does, such as a small different coloured blocks, a scoreboard and a preview box to show you which tiles are coming next. A nice addition is a ghost image of where the current block will land, letting you strategise your game a lot better. There are three difficulty levels on offer (easy, medium, hard) and several innovative game modes, such as levels with junk rows of blocks that can't be taken out. Be warned, though: the accompanying soundtrack is a bit annoying! Still, you can always mute it and play an enjoyable game of Tetris for free.

Platform: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.caywen.com/kevtris

Scrobble [Windows Mobile]

The famous word-building board game, Scrabble, has a virtual version for Windows Mobile that is another creation of the wonderful XDA Developers community. Scrobble is still a single-player game, played against three AI bots. A few changes have been made from the actual version to make development easier. First, there are no 'challenges' in Scrobble; all words on the board must be legitimate words found in the Scrobble dictionary. Real-world masters will take a little time getting used to this, as the Scrobble dictionary is not the same as the one that comes package with the board game. Thankfully, there is a convenient 'Look up word' tool to get you going. Also, unlike the real Scrabble where you can exchange a few letters when you pass a turn, Scrobble forces you to change all the tiles you have. Still, none of these changes take away from the fun of a quick round of word-building.

Platform: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: www.spacetornado.com/node/3forum.xda-developers.com/showthread.php?p=3206316&posted=1

Moonlight Mahjong Lite [iPhone]

The Chinese game of Mahjong, where a stack of tiles has to be dismantled by pairing two identical tiles, is one of the most popular single-player games. Developed Michael Howard has recreated the game virtually with Moonlight Mahjong Lite for the iPhone, stacking the tiles in a 3D view that can be shifted around easily using your fingers or zoomed in and out with the default pinching techniques. If you want to eliminate a set of tiles, tap one and then the other in succession. The 'Lite' version is free and offers four puzzles; but if you do enjoy it, try out the commercial full version with over 50 levels.

Platform: iPhone

Download: iPhone Apps Store

Price: Free

Labyrinth Lite [iPhone]

The iPhone's accelerometer lends itself to some creative games, and also to a few classics. Some of you may remember the old labyrinth puzzles we used to get: a cheap plastic case with a ballbearing in it, where you had to take the sphere to the outermost point and drop it in a hole. Some versions came with holes in the middle

of the path that you had to avoid. You found yourself rotating the disc in many different ways and could spend



hours doing it. Developers Codify AB have used the iPhone accelerometer to great effect to recreate this game on a virtual level, as you move the phone about just like you did the plastic disc all those years ago. The free Labyrinth Lite offers 10 levels of gameplay, while the commercial version boosts this to 500!

Platform: iPhone

Download: iPhone Apps Store

Price: Free

World Cup Ping Pong Lite [iPhone]

The simplistic game of table tennis has always been popular in its virtual avatar, as you strive to keep the ball on the other

side of the table in a series of back-and-forth plays. Developer Skyworks' World Cup Ping Pong for the iPhone is not revolutionary in any way: It just does what a lot of Pong games have done so far, while providing polished graphics. Played



Play ping-pong on your iPhone

with a first person perspective, you have to control your paddle by taking it left to right with your thumb, while the game auto-adjusts the depth. The commercial version offers lots of features, including multiplayer, but the freeware version is good enough to keep you entertained for a long time.

Platform: iPhone

Price: Free

Download: iPhone Apps Store

Shuffle Shock [Symbian]

The entire video gaming industry is arguably an offshoot of Atari founder Nolan Bushnell and his first creation, Pong. The first video game ever made has remained popular over 30 years, as is evident by Shuffle Shock for the Nokia 5800 XpressMusic, developed by Pixels Beats Paper. Like the original, the game displays what looks like the top-down view of a table tennis game. The player controls a paddle on the right of the screen and the objective is to get the bouncing ball through to the

other side, which is defended by a computer-controlled paddle. With four difficulty levels on offer, this addictive game might just make Nokia touchscreen users forget that their phone is capable of doing a lot more!



Ah! The seminal Pong on the Symbian

Platform: Symbian S60 5th edition

Price: Free

Download: pixelsbeatpaper.blogspot.com

MiniBlaster [Symbian]

Remember Bomberman, the incredibly entertaining little game on your Nintendo game console? Programmer Martin Storsjo has created a virtual recreation of it, dubbed the MiniBlaster.

Playing as the tiny protagonist, whose appearance seems inspired by a Lego character, you have to make your way through the maze of brick walls by blasting through them. A few enemies will try to stop you, so place your bombs carefully and make sure you duck for cover. Along the way, you will receive upgrades and extra lives as you make your escape. And yes, Storsjo has managed to make the game playable via Bluetooth for multiple players!



Platform: Symbian

Price: Free

Download: www.martin.st/software/blaster

Frozen Bubble [Symbian]

If you don't already have Frozen Bubble on your Symbian S60 phone, rush to your nearest PC and download it right now! Incredibly

addictive and completely free, the objective of the game is to launch a coloured 'bubbles' from the bottom of the window at a cluster of coloured bubbles on top. If you form a chain of three similarly-coloured bubbles, those will break off and fall, taking as many bubbles as they can with them. But there's a catch: The roof is descending slowly to the bottom of the screen, and the challenge is in getting all the bubbles out of the way before it any remaining ones reach the end. With 100 levels of gameplay (don't worry, it can be saved at any point), Frozen Bubbles will keep you busy for a long time!

Platform: Symbian

Price: Free

Download: fb-s60.sourceforge.net



Frozen Bubble is incredibly addictive!

M-SuDoKu [Java]

Given that every single newspaper brings a daily dose of the SuDoKu mathematical game to its readers, its popularity cannot be denied. The Java-based M-SuDoKu is an easy way to get your favourite game on to your cell phone. Operated via a keypad or a touchscreen, the game claims to offer virtually unlimited number of grids and lets you choose one of two difficulty levels – medium or difficult. Along with customising the background, players can opt for hints that highlight easily-solvable squares, check the puzzle when they are done filling the boxes, or simply skip it and move on to the next grid. In case your phone has trouble running the game, developers PhonPhun have also released a lighter version of the game by removing additional languages and background colours – helpfully calling it M-SuDoKu-LE.

Platform: Java

Price: Free

Download: phonphun.altervista.org



Sudoku for the Java phones

Chess by Cellufun [Java]

If the game of kings is what you want, Cellufun's version is definitely the best we have seen. The interface is clean and tidy, with the '5' key selecting your piece, moving it using '2', '4', '6' and '8' keys for direction and placing it on your desired key by pressing '5' again. The options are robust, with 10 levels of AI difficulty that can get really challenging from level three onwards. You also have the ability to choose your side or keep it at random; and the game will even track your statistics for you to know how you are progressing. Cellufun's Chess even offers an online version, but we suggest you stick to the offline gameplay.

Platform: Java

Price: Free

Download: www.brothersoft.com/mobile/chess-by-cellufun-download-111.html



The AI offers 10 levels of difficulty in this chess game

Hangman DX [Java]

One of the most popular pen-and-paper games can now be played on any cell phone, thanks to programmer David Storey's Hangman DX. The game boasts of over 1500 different words or word combinations for you to guess. The computer, of course, starts drawing a hangman for every mistake you make and keeps a score for all the correct entries. The colourful graphics of the hangman are very well done, complete with crossed-out eyes for effect. With simple categories such as films, books, countries, etc, this one is a great way to kill some time.

Platform: Java

Price: Free

Download: <http://www.lostincode.co.uk/mobile.htm>



Blackberry

PacMan

No kidding, it's just the same old arcade game developed by Namco. For the uninitiated (and really, have you been living under a rock all these years?), you play as the little yellow sphere with a hunger for tiny yellow dots and fruits. As you go along the maze, you are chased by four ghosts – Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde – whom you have to avoid. There is a workaround, though: Eating the bigger yellow dots in the four corners will make you the predator who goes after the now-eatable ghosts for a limited amount of time. So why are we including this in a list of best mobile phone games? Just try playing it on the new Blackberry phones with the trackball – Pac-Man has never before been such a smooth ride.

Platform: Blackberry

Price: Free

Download: www.bennychow.com/blackberry.shtml



Pac-Man for the Blackberry. Enough said!

RHex

This new game by CrucialSoft clearly borrows from Tetris; but it is almost as if the developers took Tetris and decided: "Well, we can do a lot better." Eschewing the old bricks, RHex uses hexagonal blocks falling from the top of the screen. But it's not a layer-by-layer construction that you have to do to get rid of the blocks. The hexagons are coloured,



If you like Tetris, you will love RHex

and linking four of them makes them disappear. The six-sided shape lends itself to a new twist: Instead of moving and rotating the falling pieces, you rotate the platform itself! RHex is a lot more complex, a lot more challenging and a lot more fun than Tetris ever was.

Platform: Blackberry

Price: Free

Download: crucialsoft.googlepages.com/rhex

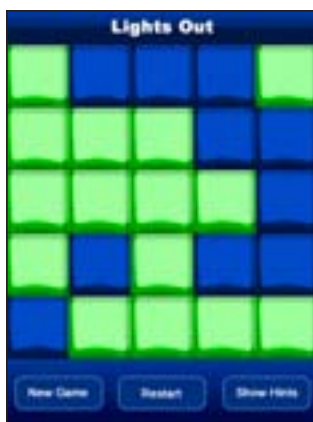
Lights Out

Blackberry Storm users, we envy you. The puzzle game Lights Out, developed by Tafasa, is among the best touchscreen games we have seen. You are shown a grid of 5x5 blocks, alternately coloured as blue (lights out) and fluorescent green (lights on), and your objective is to switch all the lights out. It's not as easy as it sounds though: whichever block you click to toggle, will also toggle all the lights adjacent to it. The puzzles are quite challenging and fun, and the developers have been kind enough to offer easy hints to solve any puzzle when you get stuck. With virtually unlimited number of puzzles, this one has the potential to be extremely addictive!

Platform: Blackberry

Price: Free

Download: www.tafasa.com



Lights Out is an excellent puzzle game

1.10 – General Tools

JabpLite

An easy way to track your expenses

Ever have trouble figuring out where exactly you are spending your hard-earned cash? You got your salary last week and your

bank account is already depleted. Where did all that money go?

In the current economic scenario, wallets have become lighter and the situation is always a little tight. It has become quite pertinent to know where one spends one's money and keep a track of one's expenditures. Well, it is a good practice to have regardless, but more so at the moment.

So what's the one item that can take textual input, is easy to carry and you usually have with you at all times? Ah, the smart phone is such a wonderful piece of technology. Oh, and those who said 'pen and paper' should go stand in a corner. Right now. No, really!

As noted earlier, not all phones come with a built-in office suite that you can use a spreadsheet software for this activity. And it would be quite insane to buy a whole pocket office suite for just this.

Programmer Malcolm Bryant was apparently in the same fix. So he decided to create his own little application to track his expenses and called it JabpLite.

Compatible with almost any mobile phone out there, the program is surprisingly robust and very easy to use.

Each new entry you make is a simple process. Choose 'New Transaction' and in the first field box, type the description of the activity you just spent your money on (for example: food shopping).

The next box provides an entry for the amount spent. Users will be glad to know that there is not any currency prefixed to the number – seeing a dollar sign in some of such free applications has been a particular source of irritation for some of us.

Following the amount, you can choose to either credit or debit it to your account. The credit clause is quite handy in case someone had borrowed money and pays it back, helping you easily keep a track.



This app acts as your electronic wallet-cum-accountant

In the transaction entry, you can also add a particular reference to the item. So for 'food', you could key in 'bought apples and oranges'.

Once you are done filling in the requisite information, click on 'Save as Regular'.

Your virtual accounting books can be segregated into six sections: Accounts, Transactions, Categories, Standing Orders, Investments and Currencies.

Transactions is the one aspect we found ourselves using a lot, especially as it gives a very detailed account of one's spending habits. And if you are like us, the huge numbers in the column for expenditures on frivolous gadgets and games will be an eye-opener!

The Accounts section was also quite useful, helping know the kind of savings we had left as it subtracted our credit card amount from what our bank account holds.

The great part about JabpLite is that it also has a desktop utility that can sync up with your mobile phone. The mother program, JabP, runs on both Windows and Mac and can export and import transactions from JabpLite. And yes, JabP is free too and available at the same site!

Platforms: Blackberry, all Java phones

Price: Free

Download: www.freepoc.org

Calcium

A zippier, simpler calculator than the default tool

One of the mysteries of life that will probably go unanswered forever is why mobile phone calculators are always clunky and difficult to use. They are the easiest application to code for any programmer, and yet, not one is pleasing to use.

For Symbian users, there is a way out. Calcium is a superb, lightweight calculator that gets the job done in a lot fewer clicks.



Why can't all mobile calculators be this simple and useful!?

In fact, we tried out the little challenge they put up on their site: Take a standard cell phone calculator and run the following equation: $(2/3) \times 7$. It took us 13 clicks, while Calcium did it in 6!

The transition has been possible because of the shift from keypad-based navigation to the joystick/navigation-pad. Calcium looks a bit like an iPod, with the four points of the click-wheel depicting the four major mathematical signs (addition, subtraction, division and multiplication), while the centre is the 'equal to' sign to calculate your solution.

A must-have on any Symbian S60 phone.

Platform: Symbian S60

Price: Free

Download: mtvoid.com/calcium

FlashKeys v1.2

A big virtual keyboard that makes typing a treat

Ever since the iPhone came on the scene with its finger-based navigation, one of the constant grips of most Windows Mobile touchscreen phone users was the lack of a keyboard which was as accurate as the iPhone when it came to thumb-typing. Still heavily dependant on the stylus, a number of them asked us if there were viable alternatives to WinMob's default keypad that would let the thumb rule.

One of the best virtual keyboard applications we have come across is FlashKeys. The keys are large, filling out the screen and providing enough room for your thumb to hit the right letters without too many errors.

Now, be aware that you will have to have Flash 7 installed on your phone to use this tool. There are three basic layouts that you get: a default QWERTY keyboard, a capitalised Qwerty keyboard (brought



FlashKeys offers a better typing experience on the Windows Mobile platform

up by hitting Caps) and a keyboard for all sorts of special characters (accessed by hitting Shift).

The background, colours and keypad skins can all be changed, providing enough customisation for those who seek it. The utility factor, though, is where the application shines.

On the bottom right of the screen, you will find a button that says 'Copy'. This one button is what makes FlashKeys such an indispensable application. Typing out a message in this program is easy, of course, but what's the use of it if you can't copy-paste it into any other place on your phone? So, simply select the text on your VirtualKeys screen and hit the 'Copy' button to minimise the window, with a clipboard that's ready to paste your sentence wherever you want to, be it an SMS or an email. Awesome, eh?

FlashKeys has also added the option to write out a few oft-used sentences and save them, although we would still prefer doing this in our default SMS drafts.

Quite a handy tool for typing, overall.

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download: 1. freewareppc.com/download/utilities/flashkeys.shtml

2. twolf.sytes.net (In the 'Mobile' tab)

SPB Keyboard

For those who just want that iPhone feel...

If an iPhone keyboard is what you want, an iPhone keyboard is what you will get – right on your Windows Mobile device!

The SPB keyboard looks great and is a treat to use, mimicking most of the features of the iPhone virtual keyboard.

Developed by SPB Software, the tool can be change its orientation from full-screen landscape to half-screen portrait view. It sports big



This keyboard auto-suggests words as you type, based on an internal dictionary

keys for easy typing, with ample space between keys so that mistakes are avoided. And yes, like with the iPhone, there's a gloss-over effect.

One of the features sorely missing in FlashKeys has been incorporated here – the autocomplete dictionary. Containing over 8,600 words, it pops up three suggestions to help you type faster.

It looks clean and neat, and is quite a treat to use. Still, all the polished products usually come for a price, right?

Platforms: Windows Mobile

Price: \$15

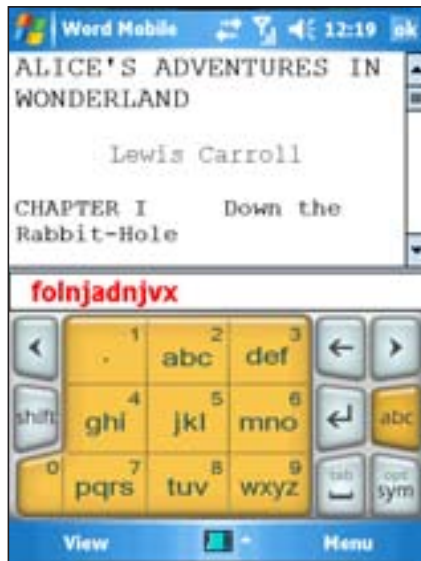
Download: www.spbsoftwarehouse.com

T9 PhonePad

The good old numpad and T9 combination...

In the end, no matter how many virtual Qwerty keypads come out, some of us still prefer the numerical keypad and the awesome T9 dictionary. We've been witness to speed-typing contests between the followers of the T9 and a clan that touts the superiority of the Qwerty. In a 2-on-2 contest, the result was 2-0 for the T9 side. And regardless of that, isn't it just more convenient to use your phone with one thumb, typing out on 12 keys?

Given this, it can be quite frustrating for such users to have no recourse to a T9-numpad on many WinMob phones. HTC had initially package a virtual T9 numpad with some



When nothing but T9 would suit you,
PhonePad is who you need to call

phones, but then discontinued it. Well, some guys at the XDA developers forum figured out a way to extract that and package it into a simple, easily-installable CAB file.

Dubbed the T9 PhonePad, the application is just what the doctor ordered for those suffering from T9 withdrawal. Goodbye, stylus!

The keys are so large, it would take Yokozuna's fingers to be able to make typos here. What's more, the grey and light-grey colour scheme with white lettering looks great, well complemented by the glossy effects.

Of course, PhonePad comes with an autocomplete dictionary, like any good T9 would.

However, it's not like the application is restricted to T9 usage. You can always type normally without the T9, which is quite handy when writing out those long Hindi messages.

This small piece of software brings with it a bagful of utility. The T9 is dead, long live the T9!

Platform: Windows Mobile

Price: Free

Download:

1. wiki.xda-developers.com/index.php?pagename=Hermes_Utils
2. Alternately, search for "Phone Pad – English only.CAB" in Google.

The hardware

Have you noticed that when you go to buy a mobile phone that sits in the palm of a hand, you always end up walking out with a box that takes two hands to carry? The message is clear: There is more to your smart phone than just the handset itself.

2.1 – Headphones and headsets

Sennheiser MM50

The reason anyone would go for an iPhone is undoubtedly the multimedia playback it offers. This is a product from the same guys who made the iPod, after all, and most people who buy it are looking to replace their MP3 player.

Here in India, the iPhone costs an arm, a leg and your 32nd tooth if you buy it from a legitimate source. Even in the grey market, the price is quite hefty. Undeterred, you plonk down upwards of Rs



A good pair of ear-buds is a must-buy for any music phone user

25,000 for this gadget and rush home to load up your music.

The wonderful Coverflow interface greets you as you skip to your favourite track and hit play. That's when the fantasy comes crashing down. It's not that the pair of built-in earphones with the iPhone has substandard audio playback; but it is simply not

good enough for anyone who has a taste for music.

The flat bass is the first let-down, and when the high sharps seem dulled, you quietly dislodge the earphones.

Of course, you can always connect the iPhone to your favourite high-end listening device. It is a standard 3.5mm audio jack, after all. But then, what do you do about incoming calls? It is simply too much trouble and rather inconvenient to have to take out your earphones, pick the phone out of your pocket, answer a call, hang up, pop your earphone back in, resume playing the song and place the phone back in your pocket. Invariably, we end up sticking with the iPhone's default earphones, no matter how the music sounds, because at least it has a built-in microphone.

Sennheiser saw this problem and has sought to address it with the launch of its new MM50 earphones for the iPhone, with a frequency range of 18,000 to 22,000 Hz.

The in-ear model has become quite popular recently and the MM50 sticks with it, effectively blocking out a lot of ambient noise. As with most in-ear headphones, the unit comes with three variant sizes for the ear sleeves.

The device, of course, is equipped with a microphone attachment with an omni-directional pickup pattern and a frequency range of 80-15,000 Hz. The button allows you to answer calls and hang up; although you still have no way of knowing who might be on the other end of the line.

A lot of microphone-equipped earphones have a weight distribution problem as the mike pulls at the two ears. Sennheiser has gone with the 'shorter on left, longer on right' wire design, which goes behind your neck and effectively distributes the weight. Nice!

The wire is sufficiently long, but does not look too sturdy. And the lack of a casing deducts further points when it comes to the safety of the earphones. Still, the longevity of the speakers is taken care of by the two year warranty they come with.

As for the quality of the sound output and the mic's sensitivity, it's a Sennheiser. Need we say more?

If you have gotten yourself an iPhone, do yourself a favour and pick this up. And yes, it works on Nokia phones too.

Product: Sennheiser
MM50 for iPhone and
Nokia handsets
Price: Rs 4,490

Sennheiser MM60

Sennheiser's PX100 was, and still remains, one of the greatest headphones ever produced. Quite a few of us here at *Digit* use and swear by this amazing piece of gadgetry.

The open-headset architecture provides great sound reproduction. And the incredible bass it offers is only further boosted by the sheer comfort of the ear pads. The extra padding in the inner lining of the headband is icing on the cake.

Carrying it around is the best experience, as the headphones snap up into a compact, folded shape that can be stored safely in the accompanying case – no bigger than a spectacles-pouch.

Compatible with Nokia XpressMusic phones, the MM60 builds on this popular headphone, adding a one-touch microphone button to let the user answer calls with ease.

The style factor is worth mention: Not only do you have a cool phone, but you have an even cooler headset to go with it!

This one, too, comes with a 2-year manufacturer's warranty and is compatible with the iPhone, apart from Nokia handsets.

Product: Sennheiser MM60
Price: Rs 4,990



The MM60 is a superb piece of sound hardware

Plantronics Voyager 855

The best Bluetooth headset we have come across

While Sennheiser's hands-free headsets offer the best audio quality we have seen for that price, the cords are still a bit



The Voyager is an excellent Bluetooth set

restricting, if you ask us. We live in a world of wireless cellular technology, high-speed wireless broadband Internet; in fact, even monitor-to-PC connections are now going wireless. Car drivers, especially, will know the tangle that hands-free corded headsets can get you into.

Bluetooth headsets have been around for quite some time now, providing immense usability while making people look at you funny as you walk down the road seemingly talking to yourself. The sheer convenience they offer is unparalleled.

There are quite a few headsets around, from companies such as Jabra, Aliph, etc, with new ones launching every other day. But the one we have found to be simply unbeatable has been around for over a year now.

The Plantronics Voyager stereo Bluetooth headset is a remarkable piece of machinery. So much so that at the 2008 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the Bluetooth Special Interest Group conferred it the title of 'Best of CES'. So what makes this headset so special?

For starters, the design itself is quite unique. We are used to Bluetooth headsets being a bit bulky, but the Voyager manages to keep a light weight regardless of its size, clocking in 15 grams on the scale. Fitted with an in-ear sleeve, the device is quite comfortable to wear.

Switch it on and your cell phone will immediately

locate the gadget. Connect with the default '0000' password and you are ready to go.

The Voyager offers decent sound quality and picks up your voice pretty well with its built-in microphone. The Bluetooth connection holds true for over a distance of 30 feet – probably further than you will ever be from your mobile phone.

However, one of our complaints with most Bluetooth headsets has been that since the mike is usually omnidirectional, a lot of ambient noise is picked up. Those who have travelled in a crowded train or bus will know that while the headset offers a lot of convenience to the user, the person on the other end of the line often complains about the noise surrounding the user's voice.

That's where the Voyager shines. The microphone, located at the bottom of the earpiece, can be extended out. The sliding boom mike increases call quality exponentially, and this is one of the best features of the device.

What's more, Plantronics has thrown in some coding to detect this extension as an input for the phone. So just like a slider cell phone would answer a call and hang up when you slide the keypad out, the Voyager uses a similar mechanism with its sliding mike.

But wait, we have not come to the best part yet! You probably have been wondering why a Bluetooth headset needs stereo audio. Well, the Voyager doubles up as a full-fledged Bluetooth headphone to listen to your music on the go.

A small earclip can be attached to the earpiece. At the other end of this clip is a cord with a second earphone, which is also fitted with an in-ear sleeve. Wear the earclip over the ear your earpiece is in, and take the cord around to fit the other earphone. Voila! Full stereo audio, and it's completely wireless! The sound quality isn't the greatest and definitely doesn't hold a candle to the Sennheisers; still, if calling is your priority and music is just a luxury, then it more than suffices.

Apart from a call and mute button, the main earpiece sports two small keys to increase or decrease the volume. While in music player mode, the latter double up as playback controls to skip to the next or previous track.

Plantronics claims a battery life of up to seven hours, which is enough for the average user. Recharging, though, could be a pain as it reportedly takes up to two hours to get the battery juiced up.

Still, as far as quality and features are concerned, the Voyager 855 is the complete package.

Product: Plantronics Voyager 855

Price: Rs 6,799

Jabra BT2050

An affordable solution

If the Plantronics Voyager's price tag made you do a double-take, then Jabra is glad to offer an inexpensive alternative.

The BT2050 is a decent Bluetooth headset that gets the job done, and looks good while at it. The three buttons on the device (Answer calls, Volume Up, Volume Down) are quite large and well-spaced, thus allowing for convenient and easy access.

Measuring no more than 5cm and weighing under 8 grams, the BT2050 comes with two earhook sizes to suit your needs.

The battery is not very impressive, clocking in under four hours of talk-time and 180 hours of standby time. However, for the price the gadget is asking, you can't really complain.

Product: Jabra BT2050

Price: Rs 2,490



The Jabra remains a Bluetooth workhorse

2.2 – Docks and speakers

Logitech Pure-Fi Mobile

Turns your mobile phone into a stereo

If you have a penchant for listening to music on your phone, then have we got a gadget for you. A combination of two factors has made a lot of us depend on our cell phone as our primary portable media player: First, mobile phone companies have started coming out with handsets specialised for music playback; and second, the prices of memory cards have dropped significantly.



A wireless speaker set for listening to songs stored in your mobile phone

Indeed, 4-8GB memory cards are not an uncommon sight on a lot of mobile phones these days, and they are invariably loaded with a lot of songs. While listening to music on the move is great, there are times when you do get tired of the headphones. Sometimes, all you want to do is sit back, relax, and let the tunes fill the room over a couple of speakers.

But most docks are compatible with iPods and other MP3 players, not with a regular mobile phone. And even if your phone does support a 3.5mm audio jack, it's not always convenient to keep it hooked up to the speakers while you sit far away. We have experienced this, so trust us, the irritation of having to get up and answer a call is worse than having to sit through back-to-back episodes of one of Ekta Kapoor's shows.

Logitech, bless their souls, has sought to alleviate our troubled souls with a wonderful new offering. The Pure-Fi stereo speaker system is not only dedicated to mobile phone playback, but is also completely free of cords while doing so! Two slide-

out stands can prop the speaker up at an angle, if need be.

Bluetooth is the way to go with this stylishly designed speaker system, that offers four 2-inch drivers that claim to deliver crisp highs and warm lows. Switch on the surround sound feature and let your room be encompassed in your tunes. Still, purists will rue the lack of a dedicated woofer that results in low bass output.

The device easily syncs up with any mobile phone or other Bluetooth-enabled device (laptops, MP3 players) by pressing a simple Source button on top that lets you choose whether you want to connect via a Bluetooth, USB or audio jack. The Pure-Fi boasts of a range of 35 feet over Bluetooth, reproducing stereo sounds through A2DP.

Once you have your mobile phone connected to, your phone itself becomes the remote control. We suggest you preset your speaker system's volume to about 70 per cent at the outset (using the manual keys on top) and then control the volume of your cell phone for further tweaking. If you do plan on using the speakers outdoors, then crank up the volume all the way and experience how loud this system can get!

What's more, the system also doubles up as a hands-free unit. The Pure-Fi comes with two built-in microphones, one for recording voice and the other to damn down ambient noise. When synced up, calls can be answered through the speakers by clicking the phone's keypad or the manual key on top of the system. Calls can be ended in a similar way.

The device also features a regular 3.5mm audio jack at the back, as well as a mini-USB port. These can be especially handy when you use a double-ended jack to connect your iPod or any other device. However, the lack of a remote control does become an issue at this point. And of course, the mini-USB port comes in handy if you have a laptop that does not support Bluetooth.

The gadget's built-in battery can be recharged through the mini-USB port if connected to a PC or a laptop. On a single charge, the Pure-Fi claims to deliver up to 12 hours of continuous playback.

A complete package of style and substance, Logitech has come up with quite an offering here.

Product: Logitech Pure-Fi Mobile

Price: Rs 10,995

X-Mini Capsule speaker

A portable, tiny speaker that is louder than you expected!

Our iPhone, our Walkman and our XpressMusic have some great features and deliver superb audio. Honestly, we would not know what to do without these handy devices. The phones, by themselves, have amazing voice clarity when we answer calls.

Yet, whenever we try to play one of our favourite songs through the phone's built-in speakers, our ears start bleeding. This is the one aspect of music phones that has never been fixed, and probably never will be. The handsets are great for storing and carrying your music around with you, but the quality of the same as a speaker system leaves a lot to be desired for. Half of them are not loud enough when need be, and those that are, murder the song being played.

While we wait for mobile phone manufacturers to address these issues, a quick-fix solution is being offered by Singapore-based X-mini with their innovative Capsule Speaker.

The gadget is so tiny, you wonder if it can even squeak out any sound at all. Tipping the scales at 52 grams, you will not even notice the weight in your pocket. But like the old adage goes, appearances can be deceiving.

Connect the wire of this cute little gizmo to any 3.5-mm port on a phone and the sheer volume it doles out catches you by surprise. When not in use, the built-in wire can be tucked away neatly at the base of the device in a slot created specially for it.

Like the name suggests, the device looks like a tiny capsule, and has a helpful volume knob on the side that you might want to use as soon as you start. We really did not expect it to be that loud! It claims to be fitted with a



X Mini Capsule: tiny, but packs a mean punch

40mm driver that gives out 2.5 watts of sound, which goes to explain the rich audio reproduction.

But within this calm exterior lies a bass reproduction that is waiting to be unleashed. The device opens up to reveal a spring-like interior (kind of like an accordion) that reverberates with deep tones.

The device also has a 3.5-mm headphone out. The purpose of this is to make the player completely modular, as you can link up as many capsule speakers as you want this way. Surround sound, eat your heart out!

X-mini II claims a battery life of almost 12 hours of continuous playback. While actual usage may vary, the fact that it uses a simple mini-USB to charge is a feature we really liked.

At the price it is asking for, the X-mini II capsule speaker is an absolute steal.

Product: X-Mini Capsule Speaker

Price: Rs 1,800

Note: Sony Ericsson has already announced a new range of wireless capsule speakers, dubbed the MS 500 and the MS 410, which should be out in a couple of months.

2.3 – Car kits

LG HFB-500 solar-powered car kit

A wireless speakerphone for your car that syncs up to your mobile phone and runs on solar energy

Have you ever been puzzled looking at drivers in our cities talking on cell phones while they zoomed past? It is not the danger factor that astounds us (although that is a concern – kids, don't try this at home), but rather the fact that they can actually multitask enough to have one hand dedicated to holding a mobile phone while navigating through all that insane traffic.

While Bluetooth or corded headsets are a good alternative, wireless car kits have been around for some time now. LG's foray into the field, though, not only gets the job done, but also helps save the environment while at it.

Introduced at Consumer Electronics Show 2009, the HFB-500 is a solar-powered car speakerphone that syncs up to your mobile phone via Bluetooth. For the initial run, you will have to charge the device through your car's plug; but once you switch it on, you can simply keep it near your dashboard or hook it up in its plastic case to your windshield.



LG HFB-500 solar-powered car kit

You see, the back of the gadget is flush with photovoltaic cells. In a country like ours, there is no lack of sunshine even in the monsoon, so it will harness solar energy quite efficiently.

Once the device is paired with your cell phone, you can use it to answer your calls while driving. The built-in speakers are quite loud, and the embedded microphone picks up the user's voice with extreme clarity. Still, if the sound of your engine is draining out the caller, you can always adjust the volume of the device with the manual keys on the side.

The battery life is quite long, as the company claims two hours of solar charging will give you one hour of talk-time, with a maximum of 16 hours. Indeed, this should suffice even the most talkative user.

And just because it is an LG device does not mean it

supports only the company's products. The HFB-500 gives you free reign to use any mobile phone that is equipped with Bluetooth.

LG has yet to bring the device to our shores, but the grey market, as usual, is way ahead of them. However, if you are going to ask someone from the US to pick this up for you, it will save you about Rs 1,000-1,500.

Product: LG HFB-500

Price: \$99 (Rs 5,000 approx – official US price)

2.4 – Chargers

Brando universal solar charger

Clean, green energy to power your phones for free

No, you have not suddenly flipped to a science-fiction section of this Fast Track. Solar chargers for mobile phones are available, and have been for some time now.



This product is capable of using solar energy to charge your electronic devices – from cellphones to MP3 players!

A spotlight was thrown on solar-powered phones at this year's Consumer Electronics Show, with LG and Samsung touting their latest wares, including the previously mentioned HFB-500 solar powered car kit.

The best solar charger we have come across is undoubtedly the Brando Universal Solar Charger. Apart from mobile phones, this device supports all kinds of portable media players, laptops, digital cameras, etc. Tech enthusiasts will appreciate this wide compatibility with one glance at our clutter of charger cables.

The gizmo has been around for some time and has received rave reviews across the Internet. It's a pity it has not taken off.

Setting up the Brando Universal Solar Charger is easy. As with most such devices, the first charge will have to be through an AC outlet, to get the built-in battery primed. Then, simply open the flap of the device and point it towards the sun. Ensure that the colour switch is set to On, and you are good to go.

Once you want to start charging one of your devices, just hit the 'Off' button and hook it up to the universal plug. The universal plug supports seven different kinds of connectors, which include most of the popular mobile phones and even formats such as miniUSB. Funnily, the plug connects to the charger via regular USB, there is no USB out on the other end.

When in charging mode, Brando even lets you adjust the output voltage going to your phone; although as long as it is below 4.5V, this should not be a concern in most cases.

While the solar charging part is great, it is a bit slower than normal charging. Still, you will be using this rarely and mostly when travelling. When you are sitting at home, just plug the universal charger into an AC slot and use the other end to fit the mobile device of your choice.

We cannot vouch for the service nor want to be held responsible if something goes wrong; but in the past, we have had a good experience purchasing products from Brando over their Web site (usb.brandocom.hk).

Product: Brando Universal Solar Charger

Price: \$69 + \$3 for shipping (Rs 3,500 approx)

Note: Users might want to be on the watch for a new product from US-based Kinesis Industries (www.kinesisindustries.com): The K3 is a charger for mobile phones, digital cameras and other tools that derives its power from solar as well as wind energy!

Mophie Juice Pack Air for iPhone

Extend the battery life of your iPhone without losing style points

While it has many, many things going in its favour, the battery is not the Apple iPhone's strongest feature. Many users have complained time and again about how quickly it drains. And once 3G rolls around in India, this gripe is going to be a lot more common.

Most iPhone users wrap the handset in a cool-looking case anyway. An American technology firm, Mophie, has now developed a casing for the iPhone 3G that boosts its battery life while retaining its sleek and sexy looks.

There are other such battery extenders available, but Mophie's Juice Pack Air claims to be the thinnest among the lot. What will you get out of it? Double the battery of your iPhone!

The hard plastic case claims to extend the usage of the iPhone by 4.5 hours during 3G talk time; 9 hours during 2G talk-time; 20 hours during audio playback; six hours during video player; 4.5 hours during 3G surfing; and 5.4 hours during WiFi surfing.

The Juice Pack Air has four LED indicators on the bottom that show the status of the battery, and offer the option of switching to the handset's default battery as well. A microUSB port at the bottom of the piece can be connected to a computer to charge the device.

iPhone power users will surely want to ask any person coming in from the US to carry one of these in their suitcase.

Product: Mophie Juice Pack Air

Price: \$79.95 (Rs. 4,000 approx)



Mophie adds juice to your iPhone

2.5 – Cool Tools

Pico Projectors

Your tiny mobile screen need not be so tiny any more...

Undoubtedly, the biggest attraction at the Mobile World Congress 2009 was Samsung's I7410. When the demonstrator at the company's booth held the phone up in front of a wall, it magically cast the screen's content on it! Yes, the I7410 is the first projector phone by a major mobile manufacturer, and uses a new technology that is becoming increasingly popular: the



User your phone as a pocket projector!

pico projector.

In a nutshell, pico projectors are really tiny gadgets no bigger than a standard iPod, which can take the screen of various portable devices and project it on any blank surface. Imagine, you could watch an entire movie from your cell phone at a size bigger than your TV!

So far, the two most popular pico projectors that are already out in the American market are 3M's MPro 110 and Optoma's Pico Pocket Projector PK101.

Both devices claim to deliver clear images of up to 50 inches in size, as long as it is viewed from a sufficient distance. The default resolution that both these gizmos support is 480x320 pixels.

The projectors are also equipped with built-in speakers, but

the disappointing aspect is the low battery life. Neither device claims more than an hour's worth of continuous usage, making them a bit cumbersome at the moment. Still, if you are fine with recharging the pico projector as and when the need arises, it is an incredibly cool gadget to have.

Connected to a mobile phone via a proprietary cord, this technology is just up and coming. While we have not tested either device, the majority of online reviews recommend the Optoma over the 3M. Again, if you cannot bear the wait till these hit Indian markets, a friend from the US is your ticket to the big-screen life.

Still, most are adamant that these are the first proof-of-concept devices and better, more robust pico projectors are around the corner.

And Samsung seems to be leading the pack, with its upcoming MBP-200 pico projector that is fitted with a 2-inch screen of its own and supports myriad video and office suite formats. The device has already hit Korean markets at a price of 4,00,000 Won (Rs. 16,000 approx), so it should be only a matter of time before we get our grubby hands on it.

Product: 3M's MPro 110

Price: \$350 (Rs. 17,250 approx)

Product: Optoma's Pico Pocket Projector PK101

Price: \$400 (Rs. 19,700 approx)

Polaroid PoGo Instant Mobile Printer

Click a picture, print a picture... instantly!

The young whippersnappers among our readers might not remember the good ol' days when the Polaroid camera ruled every tourist spot. You posed with your family as the cheerful photographer framed your moment through his viewfinder and clicked. A small white paper rolled out of his camera, which he took out and shook furiously. As if by magic, your picture started to appear on that little white sheet!

But film slowly started going out of style as digital cameras took over the market. Polaroid's instant-print photo was no match for a generation where you could click a photo of yourself using that little device in your pocket that normally hears you go "Hello?"

Still, the company was not ready to give in. As the cell phone increasingly became the weapon of choice for simple photography, Polaroid decided to target these devices. The thinking was that there would always be a need for instant photographs, the technology just had to be adapted to it.

The first problem that the Polaroid faced was that printers required ink cartridges, installing and replacing which is a tedious task. The company's researchers set to work and came out with a new technology that altogether eliminated the need for ink in printing!

Called Zink (short for zero ink), the technology uses the photo paper itself as the source of colour. The patented Zink paper is an advanced composite material that is embedded with 100 billion dye crystals of yellow, magenta and cyan.

The 'printer' itself heats the appropriate parts of the paper as per the image, such that the desired crystals are activated and the paper is coloured. A single print of the 2x3-inch photo paper takes about 30 seconds to finish.

Being completely inkless, there is no waiting for the ink to dry. As soon as it's out of the device, what you see is what you get.

Ah, the device itself. The Polaroid PoGo Instant Mobile Printer is a portable gadget that measures 4.7x2.8 inches and is



Print on the go with the Polaroid PoGo Printer

just under an inch thick. Weighing around 230 grams, the tiny size and light weight ensures that you can easily carry it around without it inconveniencing you.

Before using the device, you will have to put in the requisite special photo paper. A small button throws open the door to insert the paper, along with a calibration sheet. Shut it and switch it on for the device to automatically align the print settings and spit out the calibration sheet.

Now, if you have a picture on your cell phone that you wish to print, the method is quite easy. In the options for the image, select 'Send via Bluetooth'. Once your phone asks you to choose a Bluetooth device, select the entry for the Polaroid PoGo. That's it! You will hear the printer go active and start its process. In sixty seconds, you will be holding a printout of your image in your hand. And yes, with the inkless technology, there's no need to shake it. What's more, they're smudge-free, water-resistant and can't be torn!

A single charge of the printer claims to let you print about 15 photos, which is quite sufficient according to us. After all, how many photos would you click and print in a day with your handset?

All in all, the Polaroid PoGo Instant Mobile Printer is one of the best add-ons out there for any person who loves the little lens on the back of his mobile phone.

It is not available in India at the moment, but if you have anyone coming down from the US, this is a great buy. Alternatively, you can always order it online and have it shipped. In either case, we also suggest you pick up a few extra packs of the photo paper!

Product: Polaroid PoGo

Price: \$100 (Rs. 5,000 approx)

Bluetooth Watches

A lot of style, a bit of substance...

Imagine yourself sitting in a chair or a car, your cellphone in your pocket, and you have just made a groove for yourself. You are as comfortable as you have ever been. Nothing is going to move you now. Suddenly, your phone starts ringing. The vibrations travel up your spine as you click your teeth in irritation and shift around to extract your phone. And all this

effort for a call you did not want to answer! Argh!

When we first heard of Bluetooth watches, to say we were excited would be an understatement. The idea itself was so tantalizingly cool for any tech enthusiast: Wristwatches with tiny screens that are synchronized with your cell phones! The screen itself becomes your one-point access to your mobile phone.



Bluetooth watches bring your cellphone to your wrist: see who's calling, control music, and more!

These devices are not new. In fact, Sony Ericsson's first foray was way back in 2006, with the MBW-100 Bluetooth watch.

The gadget was designed in collaboration with watch-maker Fossil; and true to form, it's drop dead gorgeous. A regular analogue clock sits on the polished face of the watch, while a tiny OLED display peeked out from under it.

Keys on each side of the wristwatch let you control various aspects of your phone. For example, if you were using your music player on the phone, you could control the playback options (Play, stop, skip to next or previous track) without ever even looking at your handset.

If someone calls you, the CallerID shows up on the screen. This feature is especially handy when coupled with Bluetooth headsets, as the latter never tell you when your pesky, inquisitive neighbor is calling to "just chat". Two keys on the side of the wristwatch allow you to reject or mute the incoming

call with ease. And yes, the screen can also show alerts for new messages received, although it can't display them.

The device can also alert you if you stray too far from your mobile phone, as the watch starts vibrating when the Bluetooth signal gets weaker.

On a single charge, the 185-gm gizmo claims to deliver up to seven days of functionality. Nice, eh?

While the MBW-100 was primarily targeted towards men, Sony Ericsson went on to launch a similar gadget for women, called the MBW-200. The device is available in three colour styles – evening classic, sparkling allure and contemporary elegance.

Not that Sony Ericsson is the only company featuring these Bluetooth watches. They are fashion accessories, after all, and which phone is more fashionable than the LG Prada?

During the launch of its glitzy touchscreen handset, LG had slipped along the Prada Link wristwatch. This one has no analogue clock, but instead sports a larger 1-inch screen with a digital output.

The features and its mechanisms are almost the same as the Sony Ericsson. A major upgrade, though, is that the Prada Link claims to be completely waterproof.

And of course, the lack of a clock severely cuts down the weight of the device to a slim 51 grams.

As of writing this article, rumours are flying thick and fast about Blackberry jumping into the game soon, with a fashionable wristwatch that would issue alerts upon receiving calls, emails, text messages, instant messages, Tweets, Facebook posts and more. Social networking on a mobile phone? Point us to the nearest Blackberry dealer please!

The sad part is that none of these wristwatches are officially available in India. However, they can be ordered online and if you are willing to watch the slightly shadier streets of our cities, you never know what you might get...

What's Next?

The rapid strides that mobile phone technology has taken caught everyone by surprise. It is not that the technology's potential was not predicted; it is the sheer speed with which it is growing. If you were to travel back in time to 1995 and tell someone what the state of cell phones would be 15 years hence, they would laugh you off and call you a lunatic. Did any of us really think that we would be carry in our pocket a fully functional computer that doubles up as a communications device, multimedia player or photography tool as the need arises?

After all this, it is still being called a fledgling technology. Industry watchers predict that these handsets will become one-point access guides to every single aspect of our lives. Electronics heavyweights such as Microsoft, IBM and Sony have long talked of and spent millions of dollars towards creating the perfect 'convergence device' – a gadget that becomes the "One ring to rule them all" as reality gets augmented by technologies. Increasingly, it seems as if the technological platform for this 'one ring' is the cellular phone. And yes, that pun was too irresistible to omit.

It is said that to know the future, one must look on the present and the past; that all events are a pattern that can be predicted by those who have the knowledge of 'now'. So instead of relying on our trusty crystal ball in the smoke-filled dark room, we collected our thoughts about the most promising upcoming technologies to try and catch a glimpse of the future of mobile computing.

3.1 – Google Android

Industry watchers are unanimous in their verdict that Google's entry into the cellular world with its own operating system, Android, will be marked as a turning point for mobile phones in the history books of future generations.

We still remember when the announcement of the OS was first made by the Open Handset Alliance (OHA). Andy Rubin, the chief architect of Android, unveiled the mobile

device platform while announcing that a “few friends” would be helping in its development. The few friends were the OHA, a consortium of companies that currently includes names such as Intel, HTC, Asus, Motorola, Vodafone, Sony Ericsson, Nvidia, Texas Instruments and LG, apart from Google. The world was abuzz with the news of ‘The Google Phone’.

And in a move that took everyone by surprise, they announced that the Android would be a completely open-source project. The biggest problem with Linux, the popular open-source operating platform for computers, is that it does not have the backing of any major company to take on the likes of

Microsoft and Apple. Android has not only Microsoft’s biggest rivals, but also some of its friends!

Then, in October last year, Sergey Brin and Larry Page rolled out the first device running the OS – literally, as they addressed a press conference while skating around. The T-Mobile G1, built by HTC, has since gone on to be criticised for its shoddy hardware; but Android has been loved by one and all.

It is not known when the device will officially come to Indian shores and how much it will cost, although the grey markets already have ‘Google-wallah phone’ priced between Rs 25,000-30,000. HTC has since announced another



Many hope that the Android OS will mark a turning point for mobile phones

handset running Android, which will be sold by Vodafone across several countries. And Samsung has recently unveiled the I7500, its first foray with the new operating system. Given the company's penchant for releasing products in India without much of a delay from the international launch, this one might be available in a few months.

Here's hoping we get the Google experience sooner than later.

3.2 - Palm Web OS

The death of the Palm has been much talked about for the past few years. When Windows Mobile stepped up the game with version 6.1, the Palm OS just could not keep up. They tried a few tricks, such as the refurbished interface for the Centro, but to no avail.

By the time the Apple iPhone came on the scene with its incredible computing experience, Palm was beaten. The company that started the trend of personal digital assistants (PDA) suddenly seemed as if it was at the wrong end of the shotgun, waiting with a blindfold and its last cigarette.

But there were rumblings within Apple about a mutiny. Apparently there was a rift within the development team for the iPhone. News started trickling through the grapevine about a lot of Apple developers being poached by Palm. What was Palm thinking?

The answer came at this year's Consumer Electronics Show, as the company unveiled a new touchscreen device – the Palm Pre (more on this later) – and a new operating system to go with it, the WebOS. If you were enamoured when you saw the iPhone OS, wait till



Will the Web OS save the ailing Palm platform?

you get a load of Palm's offering. The WebOS, for us, was love at first sight.

In a demonstration video, the WebOS was faster, slicker, better-looking and seemed more user-friendly than any operating system we have seen. One of the most talked-about features is its ability to multi-task, running several applications at the same time without slowing down the device. The iPhone, as you may know, does not support multi-tasking apart from a few select tasks.

The ability of the WebOS to multi-task so effectively lies in its construction itself. While Windows Mobile and other operating systems require programming languages such as C++ to develop applications, Palm has based its platform on basic Web development tools such as CSS, HTML and Javascript. This makes the applications a lot less resource-hungry and a lot faster to run.

The reliance on such simple languages has also made the WebOS a hit among the developer community, which has noted that it is the easiest major phone platform to code on. Hopefully, this means we will see a lot of applications when it comes around.

Operating systems, as we noted earlier, are more than just an add-on for phones and computers. In the end, they define the user's interaction with the device and his entire experience. And going by the demonstrations of the WebOS and the reactions it has received, this could just be the bigger competitor that the iPhone has had. Let's just hope Palm's marketing wing is as good as its developers team when it comes to taking on Apple.

3.3 - Bluetooth 3.0

When it comes to wireless connectivity between two devices, especially mobile phones, Bluetooth is the de facto standard used. It is installed in almost every portable computing device, is reliable, and offers good transfer speeds.

In fact, a lot of television sets, computer motherboards, car stereos and other non-conventional devices are equipped with Bluetooth now. Increasing one's control over gadgets using the handy mobile phone seems to be the norm.

But with data getting increasingly heavier, the limitations of the technology have started showing. High-definition movies and content are quite common these days, which result in large file sizes. Streaming this footage from one device to another is not possible with the current Bluetooth 2.0 standard that affords maximum transfer speeds of 2 Mbps.



Bluetooth 3.0 is 'born to go fast'

The ideal alternative, of course, was Wi-Fi/WLAN and its broader 802.11 standard, which allows for speeds of up to 100 Mbps. But the strain of Wi-Fi connections on mobile batteries is too high, even when you have small transfers going on, to make it the default connectivity technology.

In April, the Bluetooth Special Interest Group (SIG) released an upgraded version of its standard, the Bluetooth 3.0. Quoting SIG executive director Michael Foley, who will have to live with these words for the rest of his life: "Like Ricky Bobby in Talladega Nights, this latest version was 'born to go fast'."

While the reference to that abysmal Will Ferrell movie deducts a lot of style points, he was quite spot-on with the basic message. Bluetooth 3.0 integrates the 802.11 standard, turning the wireless connectivity game on its head.

Now, when you need to transfer a small file, Bluetooth will still use its current radio uplink to send the data across, thus saving battery life. But when the technology detects that you are looking to transfer much larger packets of data, it automatically switches to the 802.11 protocol, boosting speeds up to 24 Mbps.

Another aspect of the technology is that it can make

more simultaneous connections this way. So if you have a lot of pictures stored on your cell phone that you want to transfer to your PC via Bluetooth, you could now upload them in bulk.

Of course, since it has just been launched, it is the manufacturers who are first working on it. Consumer-oriented products equipped with Bluetooth 3.0 should be available within 9 months to a year, the SIG predicts.

3.4 - Charging solutions

Forgetting your mobile phone charger while going to the office is a nightmare for us at *Digit*. We all have different choices when it comes to cell phones and this obviously means we cannot borrow each other's chargers when our battery runs out. A number of expletives are exchanged where both parties lambast the other for choosing an inferior brand, but the conclusion is always the same: Why can't all these manufacturers get together and decide to sell one common charger?

In the past, pundits scoffed at our naivete when we asked this question, ridiculing us for our lack of understanding of economics and how companies make most of their money with these proprietary charging units.

When Rob Conway, the CEO of the GSM Association, finished his talk at this year's Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, you could sense the relief that the entire audience felt. The international umbrella organisation, which represents the interests of the mobile industry, had brought together some of the biggest names in cell phone manufacturers to announce



Rob Conway, CEO of GSM Association is spear-heading a Universal Charging Solution

the development of our long-awaited feature, the Universal Charging Solution (UCS).

As of now, the list of companies who have agreed to collaborate and work on the platform include the likes of Nokia, Sony Ericsson, Motorola, LG, Samsung and Vodafone.

Apparently the move has major ecological benefits, but for the end user, the real benefit is quite evident: a common format to charge your phone means that your Samsung charger would be completely compatible with your friend's Motorola handset.

The GSMA has suggested that the microUSB would, in all probability, be the common universal charging interface – a welcome move, considering the format's popularity and the upcoming launch of USB 3.0 devices that are faster at transferring electricity.

But with so many big names, does it not sound like a far-fetched dream that will have many roadblocks and be realised only by the time we rely on a walking stick? Not if GSMA has any say in it: The industry body has cracked the whip and set a deadline for itself: By January 1, 2012, a majority of phones will be compatible with the standard, they say. We wait with bated breath...

3.5 - 4G

The new generation of touchscreen mobile phones, such as the HTC Touch HD, has been increasing the resolution of the LCD display exponentially – 800x480 pixels on a cell phone is a huge number, when you consider that a lot of monitors today are still running at 1280x720 pixels. And with LG and Samsung showing prototypes of 720p screens and talking about fullHD, it's only a matter of time before your mobile phone was a complete portable media player.

On the other end, devices like the Samsung Omnia HD have brought in high-definition 720p video shooting to the tiny world of cell phones.

Now, what would be the point of such HD capabilities on these mobile devices if you could not harness their full potential while being mobile? Sure, they are fitted with up to 16GB of memory, but the point of a wireless device is



The Samsung Omnia HD offers 720p video shooting on cell phones that you should be able to use all of its content wirelessly. If you shoot a video, you should have the ability to go online and upload it to YouTube, your blog, or any other service for the world to see. And if you have a screen that can display images at high resolution, then you should be able to stream content to it while on the move too!

The 3G network – whenever it finally does come to India in a realistic package for consumers – is simply not fast enough to keep up with the demands of high-definition content, let alone while multi-tasking. With current technologies, Wi-Fi is a good option to get the task done, but it is not a truly mobile wireless solution.

4G, the next generation of wireless connectivity, is the best bet for the future. The speeds that it can provide boggle the mind, with researchers already having tested transmissions of up to 5Gbps (yes, gigabits!) while moving at a speed of 10kmph.

It requires overhauling the current infrastructure (and it would tie in to IPv6 perfectly), but it seems that most carriers have settled on 4G as tomorrow's brightest hope. There are some who have grand plans for WiMAX, but it is a bit like the HD-DVD taking on Blu-ray when it never stood a chance.

Current estimates put viable 4G networks being active in another five years. Finland, though, has different ideas, as it

has already opened up the spectrum for its telecom companies.

We applauded the Indian government when it had first decided to skip 3G altogether and concentrate purely on rolling out 4G by 2012. With the 3G spectrum just starting trials, it seems that we always take one step forward and two steps back.

The fantastic five

With all these software and hardware add-ons and accessories, you have now boosted your mobile phone to its fullest potential. That is when the tech-devil in you nudges for an upgrade. The world has so much more to offer, he says, so why would you stick with one? But before you give in to the dark side, you might want to hold on for a while, for the next few months have a lot to offer, for both Indian and international markets. Here are five upcoming smart phones that have gotten us really excited:

4.1 - HTC MAGIC

Goog-tastic!

Do you remember the first time you saw an iPod in its pristine white, looking as if it was untouched by impurity? It just seemed so inviting that you had to go and buy one. That is exactly the kind of response that the HTC Magic incites.



The HTC Magic is the second Android device; this time sans keyboard

This is the Korean company's second phone based on the Google Android OS; and not only have they fixed a lot of issues with their first foray, the fact that they are partnering with Vodafone to market it worldwide gives us hope of its launch here in the near future.

The phone itself looks fantastic and seems like a great entry for those who do not want to opt for the Apple iPhone 3G. The Magic sports a 3.2-inch touchscreen TFT that displays 65K colours at a resolution of 320x480 pixels. Equipped with an accelerometer, there is no keypad on this one – unlike its predecessor, the T-Mobile G1 – and relies, instead, on a virtual keyboard.

Unlike the iPhone, however, it is not operated by a single button. HTC's offering has a great little trackball, like the Blackberry phones, which acts as your cursor. The trackball is flanked by three buttons on each side: the left has buttons to answer a call, open the menu, or go to the home screen; the right offers the option to end calls, zoom in, or go back.

Flipping the phone around, you will meet a 3.15-megapixel camera with autofocus, that offers a maximum resolution of 2048x1536 pixels. While it can record video, the disappointment of the lack of an LED flash is quite difficult to get over.

The device is powered by a Qualcomm MSM 7201A 528 MHz processor, backed up by 192MB RAM and 512MB ROM. For additional disk space requirements, you can always throw in a microSD card to boost your memory.

The Android OS has received an upgrade on the Magic, with Android v1.5 – also known as Cupcake – that is sleeker, faster, and fixes a lot of bugs from the first release. Of course, the entire suite of Google products comes pre-installed on the phone, offering easy access to Gmail, Gtalk, Google Search, Google Maps, YouTube, etc.

One of the major flaws of the HTC Magic, though, is the lack of a 3.5-mm port for headphones. If the device is being touted as a fun, entertainment phone, the least of the requirements is the ability to connect your own headphones to it. Instead of a 3.5-mm port, the packaged earphones connect to a USB port; although reports state that the phone is now coming with a USB-to-3.5mm convertor cable.

The Magic's 1340 mAh battery claims to offer seven and half hours of talk-time, while lasting over 17 days in standby mode.

Overall, the great looks and the Google Android OS have us drooling. We cannot wait till this one comes to India!

4.2 – Palm Pre

If we were the betting type, here's where our money for 'iPhone killer' would be. A lot of phones have come and gone with the claims of being an 'iPhone-killer'. Apple's device still sits pretty at the top of the mobile world while the contenders fade away. If you were to ask us, there are only two phones we see that have the potential to overthrow the king: The Palm Pre and the Nokia N97. And we would pip for the Pre, given the amazing WebOS.

The curved, pebble-like look of the Palm Pre was what drew us in first. It's glossy, but not exactly shiny – we like! The capacitive 3.1-inch touchscreen display on top claims to render 16 million colours at 320x480 pixels, and auto-rotates with the help of the built-in accelerometer.

The gadget borrows from the iPhone, using a single button as a one-point input. We wish it did more, but the clean interface has its own benefits too.

One of the most common complaints with the iPhone is the lack of a physical keyboard. Palm has recognised this shortcoming, and its cover slides up at an angle to reveal an impressive Qwerty keypad, much like that of the Centro. The angle, the company says, lessens screen glare and is better for viewing. Clad in black, each



Many tout the Palm Pre as the most likely iPhone killer

alphabet is written in white and has a red tinge to it. As you can see, the black-white-red combination looks amazing.

On the back of the Palm Pre, you will find a 3.15-megapixel camera with enhanced fixed focus and LED flash. Rendering clear pictures of 2048x1536 pixels is more important to us than shooting videos, which the Pre does not have a built-in application for. However, considering that the WebOS is open-source, some developer should have a solution for this shortly after the launch.

Those seeking a multimedia experience will be glad to know that the Palm developers have been good enough to offer a 3.5-mm audio jack along with 8GB of internal memory; the lack of expanding the same via microSD, though, remains a concern.

Naturally, all the usually connectivity options and peripherals make an appearance. The 3G handset is equipped with GPS, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, microUSB, etc. Surprisingly, the Palm Pre does not support radio – an omission which is hard to explain, given how little space a radio transmitter takes and how little resources it uses.

Still, given the wonderful WebOS interface and the solid hardware, this one seems ready to take on the iPhone and give it a run for its money. While not available at the time of going to print, the device is expected to launch in May in the US. And we will definitely be trying to score a piece through a US-based friend or cousin.

4.3 – NOKIA N97

When it comes to multimedia, you might be hard pressed to find a device that offers more

Nokia's N95 has been the flagship product of the brand for ages now, and still remains difficult to beat. While we mentioned it as the best convergence device in last month's geek traveller's guide, we were careful enough to add a footnote: "Until the N97".

There is so much hardware packed into this beast, it is absolutely mind-boggling. The first aspect to greet you, as always, is the screen: At a mammoth 3.5 inches (16 million colours, 360x640 pixels), the resistive touchscreen has a proximity sensor, accelerometer, handwriting recognition,



The only thing missing from the Nokia N97 is a kitchen sink

and could probably tell your future if you asked nicely. It is ideal for watching movies, and the 3.5mm audio jack will play back a thumping sound over your favourite headphones.

The screen slides up and stands on a novel tilting mechanism, a bit like the Xperia X1, and the full QWERTY keyboard invites you to have a go. Large, spacious keys and a wide screen to operate the Symbian S60 5th edition OS: the built-in Pocket Office suite now makes sense!

However, the highlight of the phone lies hidden behind. The N97 rocks a 5-megapixel camera with Carl Zeiss optics, that bring you autofocus, LED flash and a video light for night-time footage. The 2592x1944 pixel images are great, but the 30fps VGA recording has stolen our hearts. And of course, there's a secondary camera on the front for video calling.

The ARM 11 434 MHz processor and 128MB of RAM will naturally make the phone fast enough. But now comes the part where you need to brace yourself. Really, make sure you are lying down, lest you fall back with a thud. Nokia has thrown in an amazing 32GB of built-in memory (no, that's not a typo) and you can increase this further with a 16GB microSD card. A potential 48GB of disk space on a mobile phone! You could fit your entire music collection on that, and

then some! Didn't we say you needed to brace yourself?

The usual suspects make their presence felt: 3G, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth with A2DP, stereo FM radio, GPS (with Nokia Maps 2.0), voice command, TV-out, and support for any audio and video format you throw at it. A surprising addition is that the Adobe Flash Lite 3 plug-in comes pre-installed. Online videos, here we come!

With so many things to take care of, you would forgive the N97's 1500 mAh battery for getting tired easily. But the Energizer bunny might hang its head in shame when it sees the Nokia play back up to 40 hours of music or nine and half hours of talk-time.

The device is set to start retailing in June for about \$700 in the US and some European markets. Hopefully, Nokia's love for India does not fade away soon and we get to see this beast before Diwali.

4.4 - HTC TOUCH PRO 2

The best for those loyal to Windows Mobile

The N97 is a great package, but since Nokia owns Symbian, we will never be seeing Windows Mobile run on the phone. And



The HTC Touch Pro will run Windows Mobile 6.1

with Microsoft wowing the crowds during its demonstration of Windows Mobile 6.5, there are quite a few of us who would love to be running the OS on a full-fledged smart phone like the N97.

Our wish is HTC's command, it seems, as it offers up a sequel to its popular Touch Pro slide-out Qwerty handset. Running on Windows Mobile 6.1, the Touch Pro 2 can be upgraded to 6.5 when it releases. With the addition of Pocket Office, the device is a complete package for those who work hard and party harder.

Of course, that is not the only change. The Touch Pro 2 does everything bigger and better than its predecessor, starting with the resistive touchscreen TFT. The 3.6-inch display renders 65K colours at 480x800 pixels with ease. The TouchFlo 3D interface is going to be an absolute treat on this knock-out, which packs an accelerometer, handwriting recognition and a touch-sensitive zoom bar.

The phone is powered by a Qualcomm MSM7200A 528 MHz processor, 288MB RAM and 512MB of ROM (expandable via microSD).

Surprisingly, HTC has decided to forgo an LED flash on the video-enabled 3-megapixel camera. The autofocus persists, but your 2048x1536 pixel images might just be too darn grainy at night.

The 3G compatibility will come in handy when making video calls on the secondary VGA camera. Also starring in this epic are Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, stereo FM, TV-out and a special guest appearance by GPS.

Offering seven hours of continuous talk-time, June will throw out the red carpet for this superstar.

4.5 – Sony Ericsson IDOU

Shutterbugs, kneel! The king is here!

Just when you thought mobile phone cameras had reached a saturation point, Lennard Hoornik – Sony Ericsson Head of Global Marketing and Vice President – jumped up on stage at the Mobile World Congress in February and showed off the Idou's 12-megapixel camera. Twelve! Most of us use digital cameras that max out at 8-megapixels!

Of course, when you are throwing in so much effort into it,



A mobile phone with a 12-megapixel camera. Enough said.

you might as well equip it with Xenon flash and autofocus for those 4000x3000 pixel images, and video LED flash for night-time shooting – and Sony has done just that. Geo-tagging? Check. Face detection? Check. Smile shutter? Check. Image stabilisation? Check. If it wasn't for the lack of good optical zoom, the phone would be better equipped than quite a few digital cameras out there.

Oh yes, we almost forgot that it's a phone too! The 3.5-inch touchscreen TFT will let you view all the images you click at a maximum resolution of 360x640 pixels; but at least the colours will be rich, since it can render 16 million of them.

There has been no word on the kind of hardware it is running on, although the company has confirmed that the operating system will be based on Symbian. The lack of information about built-in memory makes us think that a large microSD card will be all you get in the Idou.

Rumoured to have a release scheduled for October, the 3G handset comes with the usual host of technologies: Wi-Fi, Bluetooth with A2DP, stereo FM with RDS, GPS and A-GPS, secondary VGA camera for video calls, etc.